

[Reaction papers]

Reflections on a University Career Center in Guangzhou, China

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It has become more commonplace in universities in the Chinese mainland to establish career centers for providing career guidance for their students. However, most of these centers are still at an elementary stage of development. Their maturity can be obtained by considering the nature and purpose of career centers operated in other parts of the world. This article is a reflection paper in response to two articles about career centers in the United States (Garis, Reardon, & Lenz, 2012; Heppner & Jung, 2012) in this special issue. On the basis of these two articles, it explores the current situation of career centers in China, and takes a university career center in Guangzhou as an illustrative example for reviewing in detail the scope, implementation, progress, and problems of career centers in China.

Keywords: career center; university; China; career guidance

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Based on the information provided by Heppner and Jung (2012) and Garis, Reardon, and Lenz (2012) about the evolution of career centers in the United States (U.S.), this article compares their situation with the current one in the Chinese mainland. For this purpose, we have drawn mainly on our in-depth experiences in one particular university in Guangzhou (Sun Yat-sen University), where we had conducted research for more than one year. This article is not meant to provide a detailed report of that research; rather, it makes use of our first-hand experiences of the career center in the university for making comparison. The two articles from the U.S. analyzed the current status of career centers in that country, and identified how these centers have needed to respond to demographic, technological, and economic changes. Compared to this, how do career centers in universities in the Chinese mainland adapt to national changes and global trends? University career centers in China reveal distinctive characteristics, mainly due to the unique educational and social circumstances existing in the country. As Gao (2010) pointed out, the development of university career guidance should respond to specific trends in national and regional economic development, culture, and local conditions.

Background

The first career center in China was established in Shenzhen University in 1986, very much later than similar development in the U.S. (Garis et al., 2012; Wang & Dou, 2007). In 1991, the National University Career Center was formally set up in China; by 1996, all colleges and universities were required to establish career centers (Wang & Dou, 2007). Tsinghua University started work in career guidance as early as 1916, and established a career center in 1998 (R. J. Liu, 2006).

The case university in Guangzhou is Sun Yat-sen University, which has a history of over eighty years. It is located in Guangdong Province, a neighboring region to Hong Kong and Macao. The region is

recognized as being at the forefront of China's current reforms and economic development. Being one of the leading universities in China, Sun Yat-sen University is a comprehensive multi-disciplinary university, including the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, technical sciences, medical sciences, pharmacology, and management science. It also has a career center as part of its services to students.

Ma (2009) stated that almost all university career centers in China were set up during the 10 years from 1996 to 2006. As a representative example, the career center in Sun Yat-sen University was established in 2001. Like most other university career centers in China, the one in Sun Yat-sen University has been facing some difficulties, such as limited resources, immature setting, policy constraints, and fierce employment market. However, through years of development, the career center has created a comprehensive system of career services, including career evaluation, career guidance and counseling, career curriculum, and the provision of employment information. Compared to other Chinese career centers set up at around the same time, this one has developed rapidly and efficiently. Its unique characteristics include close collaboration with faculties, and direct involvement of students in conducting career-related activities. For this reason, the career center in Sun Yat-sen University was chosen as a representative and unique example for exploration.

Function

A survey in Beijing revealed that career centers in different universities in China have various names such as Graduates' Employment Guidance Center, Career Services Center, and Students' Career Center. Usually, the name reflects the scope of its services, functions and other features. This lack of uniformity in name suggests that there is no unified understanding across universities in terms of the scope and purpose of career guidance services, or the main functions

of a career center (Jin & Fan, 2002). This may be due to the fact that no laws or regulations have been issued by government departments dealing with the specific functions of a university career center (Mo, 2006). It is necessary to have a clear and definite mission statement for university career centers in China, perhaps similar to the *Professional Standards for College and University Career Services* (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2009) in the U.S., as outlined by Garis et al. (2012), but taking into account the characteristics in the Chinese context.

The main vision of the career center in Sun Yat-sen University is to serve the needs of society by guiding and serving the employment needs of its undergraduates and postgraduates. The career center endeavors to apply the concept of service innovation to carry out career guidance work in the university. The career center's major missions include: implementing national employment policies, guiding graduates to build a correct concept of choosing a career, conducting employment guidance and counseling, providing employment information and job knowledge for graduates, regulating graduates' employment skills, building a two-way bridge between graduates and employers, and implementing the university's employment programs. The aim is to make sure its graduates to have a satisfying employment.

These missions can be compared to those in the U.S. described by Garis et al. (2012); that is, providing "comprehensive, centralized, innovative career services" through a seamless university-wide system. This system is intended to support the career development of all students from freshmen through graduate students, and addresses student needs in all academic disciplines, including vocationally oriented programs as well as the liberal arts.

It seems that the career center in Sun Yat-sen University tends

to focus most on students' employment seeking and deals with employment procedures, such as introducing employment policy, registering employment whereabouts, giving guidance on signing contracts, and providing employment statistics. Much less attention is given to fostering career development and comprehensive career planning of students in all years and across all majors. This tendency seems to be typical of other career centers in China, where comprehensive, ongoing professional career guidance over time is rarely provided (Li, 2009). Even those counseling services offered are not individualized or focused enough to satisfy students' needs.

The reason why a gap exists between the ideal situation and the reality is mainly due to some existing problems or barriers, such as the lack of trained professionals, inadequate understanding of the mission, and poor awareness of career guidance principles and practices. The problems or barriers will be discussed in the following.

Operation

There are four departments in the career center in Sun Yat-sen University: Integrated Affairs, Information and Market Expanding, Employment Guidance, and Employment Management. The services and resources that the career center provides include information platform, career counseling, career workshops, and career curriculum.

Information Platform

An information network has been established to synthesize employment services, guidance and management. Students can log in to the Website with their student number and password if they wish to search for jobs and internship information, familiarize themselves with employment procedures, download related materials, undertake career assessment, or watch online career course videos. The career center has

not only built the information platform but also made it fully available to faculties and student associations. At the same time, it has taken part in building the national network of employment information service in recent years.

Career Counseling

The university has four campuses. Career teachers have the responsibility to do career counseling on each campus. However, career counseling is just one part of their job, making this a heavy workload. Counseling is classified as “student counseling” for undergraduates and postgraduates, and “enterprise counseling” for recruiters in society. The director of the career center explained that because of limited staffing quotas in the center, there are not enough professional consultants to meet the demands of students.

Career Workshops

Career workshops aim to provide all kinds of knowledge and information on career guidance and employment skills for students. This is mainly achieved by inviting experts from different fields to share with students. The intention is to conduct career workshops at least once a week, but due to the lack of professionals and limited resources, the workshop can be held only approximately every two months. This arrangement fails to meet students’ demands, and reduces the potential benefits.

Career Curriculum

In 2003, the university prescribed that a career curriculum should be compulsory for all students (Fan & Chen, 2004). The career center, in cooperation with academic faculties, has established the system of career curriculum in order to address the needs of different disciplines and various fields of employment. The system of career curriculum

includes: introduction to career planning, self-perception, the world of work, career decision-making, career preparation, the employment situation and policy, and entrepreneurship education. With regard to these elements, career lectures are held for freshmen and sophomores.

In most respects, the services offered in Sun Yat-sen University parallel those available in career centers in the U.S., but the services in the U.S. appear to be more comprehensive and professional. Garis et al. (2012) summarized that comprehensive career centers in the U.S. would typically offer the following core services and programs: career advising and intake; individual and group career counseling; assessment and computer-assisted guidance; e-portfolio systems; career information and networking; career planning classes for credit; career education outreach and programming; Web-based and onsite services; experiential education; career expositions, job fairs; on-campus recruiting; job listings and résumé referral services; and fundraising.

Vernick, Garis, and Reardon (2000) suggested that the general configuration of career centers can be conceptualized using these four dimensions: involvement in career development, involvement in experiential education, locus of placement, and locus of funding. It can be concluded that the career center in Sun Yat-sen University has weak involvement in career development, moderate involvement in experiential education, centralized university-wide placement, but full support from the university for its budget.

Personnel Involved in Career Guidance

The personnel involved in university career centers in China are mostly from administrative departments, who are familiar with students' situation, having management resources and experience, but with no specific professional training in career guidance (X. W. Liu & Li, 2007). Based on a survey in Shanghai, Lan and Wang (2010) found that of

156 staffs engaged in career guidance, 73% were under 40 years old, 48% had worked in career guidance for less than three years, and 56% held positions in departments other than career guidance. One member of staffs described the situation thus: "Career counseling is just a little part of my work. I have to handle other [many other] jobs." The situation was summed up clearly by Jin and Fan (2002). They observed that the personnel in career guidance in China have the following features: young age, highly educated, complex academic background, and short years of working.

With respect to the career center in Sun Yat-sen University, the situation is similar to the one described above. There are ten staff members in the career center: three of them in Information and Market Expanding, three in Employment Management, two in Integrated Affairs and Employment Guidance respectively, and two directors in charge of the whole center. It can be seen that the relatively limited staff is not enough to meet the demand of career guidance for over 50,000 full-time undergraduate and postgraduate students in the case university. Thus, the services in the career center mainly focus on employment management, policy advocacy, and employment procedure. However, the scarcity of one-on-one personalized coaching, as well as the lack of opportunities for doing relevant research on career guidance and comprehensive career programs, is mainly due to the lack of manpower and professional knowledge.

Compared to international benchmarks, in Canada, there are 10 to 30 full-time professional consultants depending on the number of students in each university. In the U.S., a career management team accounts for roughly 1% of the number of students. The proportion of career staffs and students is 1:300 to 1:500 in first-rate universities, but about 1:1,000 in middle-ranked universities. For instance, in the University of Maryland, there are 35 employees in career center and

1 or 2 career professionals in each faculty (Huang & Hu, 2002; Wang & Dou, 2007). In contrast, the national situation in China is not so generous regarding staffing. A survey in Beijing revealed that there was less than one full-time career teacher for every 1,000 university students on average (Jin & Fan, 2002). According to a sample survey for 206 full-time career staffs, only 11.1% possessed the professional qualification, which meant on average there was only one professional career teacher for 3.5 universities (Shao & Huang, 2004). According to the standard of the Ministry of Education, and based on the successful experience of developed countries, how many career professionals are needed should be calculated with the ratio of 1 professional to 500 students. If so, about 1.5 million career professionals will be needed to meet the demand for career guidance in China (Cai & Liu, 2006).

In general, universities in the Chinese mainland have not yet established a major area of study for guidance and counseling; nor have they established a professional training system for university career teachers. For these reasons, at present, career teachers lack specialized training (Lan & Wang, 2010). To a great extent, the development level of career guidance in a university depends on the concept, quality and professional knowledge of the personnel involved in career guidance. Hence, professional training for career teachers is crucial to the enhancement of career guidance in mainland universities.

Currently, training in career guidance and career assessment is relatively weak. It is commonly done through regular professional training sessions and academic exchanges. The training for personnel in career guidance should gradually put adequate focus on career planning (Jin & Fan, 2002). Different from the situation in China, in U.S. universities, student diversity is a characteristic. With regard to training of staffs for career guidance and counseling in the U.S., Heppner and Jung (2012) recommended that for a career center to work effectively

with diverse student clientele, all staffs must participate in high-quality multicultural and cross-cultural training.

Current Trends With Chinese Characteristics

Despite the fact that the status of career centers in mainland universities has frequently been deemed inadequate, there are some evident features that reflect their efforts to adapt to China's specific conditions. Mo (2006) and Gao (2010) summarized the current trends with Chinese characteristics and suggested "reducing the burden" and "grafting the function" to improve the situation. "Reducing the burden" is to simplify the unnecessary employment formalities and make management of career work simpler. Wu, Kang, and Mo (2004) pointed out that it is a tendency to build a career guidance working system constituted by university leaders, functional departments, faculty leaders, tutors and professional teachers, which makes a clear-cut division of labor and necessitates cooperation among divisions. In this system, the career center is the leader, and career teachers in faculties become the major force of implementation. "Grafting the function" means introducing into the university the function and resource of career service in society, such as the school-enterprise cooperation mode. It is necessary to cooperate with outside enterprises and career organizations in society on the basis of complementary advantages. This means not only sharing resources inside and outside the university, but also providing internships and job opportunities for students. For example, Tsinghua University cooperates with a career organization to develop the "pre-employment education on-line classroom," using network-based career guidance to supplement the career guidance activities in university (Mo, 2006).

In Sun Yat-sen University, in order to improve career guidance, two approaches are applied to "reduce the burden" and "graft the function." These two approaches are: better collaboration between the career center

and the faculties it serves to avoid duplication of services or processes; and greater direct involvement of students in career-related activities connected with outside agencies.

Career Center and Faculty Collaboration

The large number of enrolments in mainland universities at the present time has caused an overload of work on the personnel involved in career guidance. Career center staffs in Sun Yat-sen University have strived to increase faculty awareness, interest, and active involvement in the variety of programs, services and resources offered. As Arthur and Menzel (1990) suggested, faculty can be a source of student referrals, can promote programs and provide resources. In response to this situation, a career guidance system named “Career Center – Faculty” has been developed in the case university in Guangzhou. The main components of this collaboration are: employment tracking, employment procedures, targeted career guidance, and curriculum construction.

In the case university, the career center is in charge of graduates’ employment and career guidance for students, carrying out macro-management and supervision in terms of drawing up employment policies and plans, collecting and publishing employment information and statistical data related to career guidance and employment. For reducing the heavy burden of the career center, tutors and deputy secretaries in faculties take responsibility for career and employment work in their own faculties. According to the diverse situations and characteristics of different faculties, they carry out specific career guidance programs and activities, provide career curriculum and employment guidance for students, implement individual counseling, and track students’ development. Under the organization of the career center, faculties have developed a series of staff seminars for constructing career guidance curriculum jointly. The aim of these seminars is to improve the quality of the career curriculum and to build

a comprehensive system for career guidance through the share of teaching experience, discussion of curriculum construction, and preparation for teaching. Seminars have been held about once a month since November 2011, with participants including deputy secretaries or staffs in charge of career guidance in each faculty.

There are two advantages of this “Career Center – Faculty” system. On the one hand, tutors are close to students in daily university life, so they know students’ personalities, characteristics and academic performance. They are also aware of employment resources. Heppner and Jung (2012) claimed that it is important “to be aware of the role of culture, to have sufficient knowledge of the client’s cultural context, and to use appropriate skills when interacting with diverse clients.” Hence, when tutors can supplement employment resources in addition to the services provided by a career center, students can receive targeted guidance and help. On the other hand, a significant attempt in collaborating between career center and academic faculties on career guidance not only reduces the heavy workload of career center staffs, but also makes career guidance better known and more effective and helpful for students. Nonetheless, the implementation of career guidance presents different challenges in different faculties, due to, for example, different resources and degree of emphasis placed on career guidance. Students receive effective career guidance in some faculties where there is strong interest, but in others the quality is lacking. Thus, it is hard to improve the *overall* level of career guidance in the university because of different perception of importance by various faculties.

Student Involvement in Career Guidance

Another characteristic of the career center in the case university is student involvement in implementing aspects of career guidance. Students’ Career Development Association (SCDA), a non-profit-making student consortium originated and supported by the career

center and some other university departments, is operated by students. The vice director of the career center, one of the founders of the SCDA, had the following remark about the association:

I think it is necessary to let students guide themselves and make efforts for their development. Media said it is the first formal students' career development association in the universities in China. At the time when the association played a leading role, many colleges and universities then followed. (Sun Yat-sen University, 2009, p. 9)

The SCDA also demonstrates an approach to “reducing the burden” and “grafting the function” for the career center through involving students in implementing career guidance activities. Students in the SCDA take part in the preparation and implementation of various career activities, particularly those involving outside resources (e.g., campus recruitment fairs, recruitment talks, career lectures, and career programs). However, students are not involved in professional work, such as counseling. To some extent, the SCDA facilitates the development and conducting of career guidance provided by the career center. The SCDA has also been setting up a bridge to connect the university, students, and outside enterprises over the years. Cooperation with enterprises is a factor that makes the SCDA special. It seems that the SCDA has opened the door to students for understanding more about the employment situation and career information in society. Furthermore, with the resources and help from enterprises, career guidance can be made more realistic, and the effect of career guidance will be enhanced. To a large extent, the progress of the SCDA depends on both the cooperation with enterprises and the support from the university.

The varied and numerous activities and programs run by the SCDA help to make up for some insufficiencies in career guidance available from career center. Career guidance conducted by students is innovative.

Not only can students understand more of the contemporary employment needs and opportunities, but they are also forced to think about their own career planning. Some valuable career competencies are undoubtedly trained during the process of carrying out career activities.

Future Direction for Development

Taking account of international trends, Garis et al. (2012) stated that career centers will need to conceptualize their mission in terms of broader outcomes than simply “job placement” and include such elements as employer visits, employability skills training, social networking contacts, career assessments, and job interview appointments.

In this respect, university career centers in China should think of their future developments. For example, how to adapt to international trends? How best to meet the emerging demands of students under the economic and social changes occurring in China? How to learn from overseas examples? How to increase the number of suitably trained professionals in the career guidance field?

Career centers have to perfect their systems and enhance their professional services. Some researchers have already made efforts in this direction. For example, Mo (2006) suggested that a career center must change from “single function” to “multifunction.” Career centers should address four areas of operation: management, education, services, and research. These four functions reflect different needs of different groups. The management function shows the need of government to manage university students’ employment. The functions of education and services are based on the needs of students and the employment market. Career centers have the duty to guide students and help them connect with employers. In order to provide niche targeting guidance, it is necessary to conduct ongoing research on the employment market and

on career guidance models. These four functions influence and promote each other.

At the same time, career centers have to reduce their workload and simplify employment procedures to streamline the management. Where relevant, much greater use of information and communications technology should be made to facilitate service delivery and dissemination of career-related information.

Summary

Currently, university career centers in China remain at an early stage of development, lacking the support of research and rich experience. There is still a long way to go for university career centers in China to become highly effective, but the notion of a “comprehensive career center” such as those operating in the U.S. (Garis et al., 2012) is an irresistible trend. In consideration of the needs of contemporary China, an appropriate developmental path should be explored. Some characteristics of the present system are worth carrying forward, such as involving students directly in career guidance, and closer collaboration between career center and academic faculty. In each university, the development of its career center needs to have a better coordination with the situation and characteristic of the university, as well as with national policies.

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對中國廣州市一所大學職業生涯中心的反思

在中國內地大學，設立職業生涯中心為學生提供就業指導的情況愈趨普遍。然而，這些中心大部分都在發展初階，並未成熟，需要參考世界各地同類中心的運作，謀求改進。本文通過對本專輯中談及美國職業生涯中心的兩篇文章（Garis, Reardon, & Lenz, 2012; Heppner & Jung, 2012）的回應，探討中國相關的現況，並以廣州市一所大學職業生涯中心為例，討論其服務範圍、運作情況、發展方向及所遇問題等。

關鍵詞： 職業生涯中心；大學；中國；就業指導