

Career Centers in Higher Education in South Korea: Past, Present, and Future

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Career centers in South Korean universities have evolved to meet the career needs of college students and societal changes. The rapid increase in unemployment rates in the recent 20 years has heightened the importance of university career centers, yet a systematic career service model has not been devised to reflect the diverse career needs of college students. This article investigates the current situation of service delivery of university career centers in South Korea. A total of 15 career centers responded to the questions about how often they provided specific career services and how important each service was in their service delivery. Results showed that the career centers focused more on career placement than career exploration services. Also, there were discrepancies between the most frequently offered services and the most important services. Based on the results, future tasks for career centers are discussed in terms of the balance between career exploration and placement services, staff expertise, technology use, and tailored programs for specialized career fields.

Keywords: university career centers; career services; college students

The prevalence and severity of psychological distress has been frequently observed in college students. Various studies (Crespi & Becker, 1999; Fouad et al., 2006) have shown that students during their college years have a higher level of stress than the general population. Among several stressors including academic issues (Crespi & Becker, 1999; Prillerman, Myers, & Smedley, 1989), financial concerns (Frazier & Schauben, 1994), and interpersonal/social strain (D'aurora & Fimian, 1998; Prillerman et al., 1989), career concerns is the major stress that confronts Korean college students (Choi et al., in press). Owing to various reasons, including rapid changes in the work environment in recent years, Korean college students suffer from excessive career and employment stress. As a result, most Korean college students put much effort into increasing their employability to obtain a job after graduation (H. R. Park, Choi, Nam, & Lee, in press).

Future preparation and career decisions play a critical role in a person's life development and must be properly taken care of (Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington, 2000). In South Korea, high school students cannot think meaningfully about the purpose or worth of their life because they are making efforts to prepare for the college entrance examination, thus resulting in multiple difficulties in these individuals' career exploration and decision-making after entering college (Choi et al., in press). When students enter college, they not only need to perform academic activities in higher education but also has to prepare for a future by vigorously exploring and selecting their future career. College students who are in need of guidance and help in designing their future and making career decisions need to seek professional career services on their campus (H. R. Park et al., in press). Career services for college students are usually provided through a university career center, often called "career development center" or "career counseling center." This article illustrates how university career centers have evolved to play a central role in career development of college

students, examines their current situation and the challenges they are facing, and suggests future directions to meet the changing societal demands.

The Development of Career Centers in Higher Education in South Korea

Researchers agreed that career centers have developed through four periods that are distinguished by their structure and function (J. G. Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2007). In each period, career centers transformed their roles and scope of services to meet societal changes. The first period is characterized by the undifferentiated structure and minimal provision of career services in the 1980s. Although official documents failed to record how career centers were first established in higher education, the influx of college graduates into the employment market in the 1980s seems to lead universities to set up a precursor of the present career centers (J. G. Lee et al., 2007). During the first period, the staff in student affairs office provided minimal career services, such as offering information about part-time or full-time job openings along with other student services. The staff with the sole duties of career services only emerged in the second period which is between 1990 and 1997. Although this change reflected the recognition of the needs for career services, the staff still offered basic placement services including employment information and assistance with job application and recommendation (Jin, Jung, & Lee, 2010; H. J. Lee, 2002; J. G. Lee et al., 2007).

The significant changes in career centers were brought by the national economic crisis in 1997. This economic crisis resulted in massive layoffs and reduced new hires, which, in turn, created a large number of unemployed college graduates. Universities responded to this by restructuring their career centers. They increased the number of staff for career services and created more structured organizations with

independent physical space. The services were expanded as well to include hosting career fairs, providing workshops on job search skills, and managing internship programs (J. G. Lee et al., 2007).

However, the most visible transformation of career centers happened in the fourth period starting 2004. As the unemployment of college graduates became a societal issue, the government intervened with the career services in universities (Jang & Go, 2010; J. G. Lee et al., 2007). The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology announced the employment statistics of each university and suggested that each university should create career center to provide more comprehensive career services (Jyung, 2002; Lim, 2005), which led to the establishment of career centers with independent budget and increased number of staff in universities. Furthermore, the Ministry of Labor started providing financial support to career centers (Jang & Go, 2010). These governmental policies and financial support contributed to remarkable changes in career centers. First, the official centers were set up. Although career centers in the third period also had a relatively independent organization and physical space, they were still considered as a sub-agency of student affairs office. The career centers in the fourth period are recognized as a more independent agency with unique roles. The services provided by career centers became diverse. Along with the services provided before, career centers began to offer career counseling, college courses related to career exploration, and special lecture series (Jang & Go, 2010; Jin et al., 2010; J. G. Lee et al., 2007). The following section will further describe the current features of career centers in South Korea.

The Current Status of Career Centers in Higher Education in South Korea

As stated earlier, career centers have developed remarkably in recent years. The current status of career centers is largely reflective of social

awareness of the needs for more systematic approaches to career exploration and placement services. With regard to the structure, an increasing number of career centers have become recognized as an independent agency, performing unique student services. Although 42.1% of career centers are still housed under student affairs office, 48.4% of them are an independent agency with autonomy (J. G. Lee et al., 2007). This autonomy allows them to exert more influence on university policies, to have more control over program development, and to expedite the process of decision-making, all of which contribute to making career centers more visible in universities.

Career centers also have staff members exclusively assigned to the centers. The number of career center staff has continuously increased, and the average number of staff members is 4.3 (Lim, 2005). Although they are mainly in charge of career services, they need to transfer to other campus agencies after a certain period of time under the university employment policies (J. G. Lee et al., 2007; Lim, 2005). This compromises the continuity of career services and the development of staff expertise.

Today's career centers not only provide special job-related programs (e.g., job hosting) and exhibitions on career issues (e.g., career fair), but also make available career counseling services (e.g., individual and group counseling). According to Lim and Lim's (2003) meta-analysis, most Korean college students who had received career services reported that they were very satisfied with the services they received. In terms of the effectiveness of career counseling programs in South Korea, the overall effect-size was surprisingly high (Cohen's $d = 1.16$). That is, the level of career-related factors (e.g., career maturity, career decision-making self-efficacy) of the students who had received career services from career centers were much higher than that of students who had not received any career services.

Despite the effectiveness of career services, career centers still have not developed a comprehensive and culture-sensitive service model. Many administrators in colleges and universities view the role of career centers as the agency for job placement services only. In addition, although the variety of life issues may be interrelated with career concerns, many of which result from or lead to psychological distress, many mental health professionals (e.g., counselors and psychologists) too often ignore the career concerns of clients to focus on their relationship issues (Fouad et al., 2006; Whiston, 2000). According to stress-related research (Jung, 2007; Kang, 2006), for college students, perception of various life stressors (e.g., interpersonal conflict) significantly predicted or were predicted by career-related variables, such as career maturity, career decision-making self-efficacy, and career indecision. When individuals felt a high degree of stress-caused depression, their level of career maturity decreased, and vice versa.

Therefore, the functions of career centers should be more comprehensive and systematic to meet the college students' complicated needs on career issues (H. R. Park et al., in press). The changes in the roles of career centers in the United States are supporting evidence for the necessity of comprehensive and systematic functions of the current career centers. The career centers in the United States started as an agency for career placement, yet have shifted their attention to career exploration and planning based on life-span career development, providing not just job-search assistance, but also career counseling and networking (Wessel, 1998). Thus, in the future, career centers should consider developing comprehensive career services that can address a wide range of career concerns.

The development of an appropriate service model requires the scrutinized investigation of the career services provided by career

centers. Previous literature has approached this issue from the recipients' perspectives, focusing on the perceived needs of career services of college students (Gong, Song, Kim, & Min, 2005; K. Y. Park, 2009). Gong et al. (2005) reported that college students perceived that both career placement and exploration services were important. K. Y. Park (2009) used a more sophisticated method to assess the needs for career services. He assessed the current competence and the required competence in specific career development skills (e.g., self-understanding, résumé writing, etc.) and calculated the priority of career services based on the magnitude of the discrepancies between the current and the required competence. The results indicated that college students have stronger needs for career placement services than career exploration services, when considering both the current and the required competence.

However, little is known about how career centers perceive the current delivery system of career services. University career centers provide a wide range of career services and each center has unique services to reflect the needs of their students and the university policies. To develop a comprehensive career service model, the scope and the relative importance of each career service should not be investigated only from the recipients' perspectives, but should also be from the service providers' perspectives. In the present study, we investigated the major career services provided by career centers to explore the patterns of service provision of these centers. Specifically, we examined how often each service would be provided and how important each service would be. Using these objective (frequency) and subjective (perceived importance) indices, we tried to estimate the relative proportion of each services in the total service provision. The findings on the current practice of service provision would help to identify the limitations in the current model and develop a more effective service model.

Method

Sample

We contacted 170 university career centers participating in the Korean Council for University Career Centers and received responses from 25 university career centers in South Korea. Among the 25 responses, we excluded those with incomplete data and had 15 left. Although the response rate was low, the purpose of this study was not to generalize the results but to explore the patterns of career services provided by university career centers. Thus, we believe the results can still offer preliminary illustrations of the operation of career centers. The career centers that responded to the survey questions belonged to universities in four different regions of South Korea. These universities varied in size, the smallest with 2,303 students and the largest with 28,931 students. The average number of students was 16,337.

Instruments

A survey questionnaire was developed to reflect a wide range of career services provided by university career centers. Based on previous literature and studies, a list of typical career services was prepared to include the categories of career exploration services and career placement services. For each career service, participants were asked to report how many times they provided each service every year and to estimate the percentage of importance of each service compared to other services.

Procedure and Analysis

The questionnaire was sent to university career centers listed in the Korean Council for University Career Centers via email. The questionnaire was completed by one of the full-time staff members in each center and returned by email. The responses of the 15 university career centers were averaged to reflect the central tendency.

Results

Results showed that university career centers provided diverse career services. These career services could be categorized into two groups, career exploration and career placement. Table 1 indicates that career center staff provided career placement services (2,768.1/year) more frequently than career exploration services (210.7/year). In addition, career center staff also considered that career placement

Table 1. Career Services Provided by University Career Centers (N = 15) in South Korea

Category	Service	Frequency of service delivery (per year)	Relative importance
Career exploration	Individual career counseling	163.2	4.5%
	Career workshops	2.8	1.8%
	Career exploration courses	7.6	5.8%
	Special lectures on career exploration	10.7	2.7%
	Field trips	5.0	1.2%
	Mentoring programs	14.5	1.5%
	Other career exploration services	6.9	1.9%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>210.7</i>	<i>19.5%</i>
Career placement	Individual job search counseling	340.5	7.8%
	Job search workshops	4.6	6.4%
	Job search courses	31.1	7.8%
	Special lectures on job search	25.4	5.4%
	License preparation	6.8	2.8%
	Exam preparation	2.8	2.1%
	Recruiting and career fairs	63.5	19.7%
	Internship programs	39.4	7.7%
	On-line employment information	2,224.4	11.3%
	Other placement services	29.6	9.5%
<i>Total</i>	<i>2,768.1</i>	<i>80.5%</i>	

services (80.5%) were more important than career exploration services (19.5%). Among career exploration services, individual career counseling (163.2/year) were most frequently provided, yet career center staff believed that career exploration courses (5.8%) were more important than other career exploration services. Regarding career placement services, recruiting and career fairs (19.7%) were considered the most important placement services, although on-line employment information service (2,224.4/year) was the most frequently provided.

When examining each of the career services closely, career exploration services are targeted on understanding self, choosing a major, as well as exploring the world of work via individual career counseling, career workshops, career courses, special lectures on career exploration, field trips, and mentoring programs. Individual counseling offers students the opportunity to explore various issues related to career decision-making, but mainly deals with personality or career interests based on career assessment results.

Career workshops, career courses, and special lecture series are educational services. Career workshops are intensive educational programs for the first- or second-year students. They are designed to help students develop their life goals, adjust to college life, and prevent dropping out. Specifically, they offer education on various topics such as understanding the results of career assessment, choosing a major, maneuvering college life, developing leadership, exploring and planning life goals, managing time, networking, and so on. Career courses are offered as elective college courses with credits. The course curriculum consists of the importance of career, understanding self, understanding the world of work, career decision-making, and career planning (Heo, 2009). Special lectures deal with specific topics, usually focusing on particular career fields. Alumni or experts in given fields are invited to provide these lectures to present detailed information about the fields.

Another ways to foster students' career development are field trips and mentoring programs. Career centers organize field trips, in which students visit business sites to learn more about the companies and work duties as well as the application process. Mentoring programs are designed to facilitate students' networking with academic advisors, alumni, or CEOs. Owing to the limited number of available mentors, each mentor often has multiple mentees.

As regards career placement services, they are designed to assist students with obtaining employment opportunities and developing necessary skills to secure an employment. The modalities of career placement services are similar to those of career exploration services, such as individual job search counseling, job search workshops, job search courses, special lectures on employment information, and job search skills. These services are different from career exploration services in that they focus on specific job search skills such as résumé writing or interview skills. Individual counseling is provided usually for a shorter period of time (1–2 sessions) to help students locate desired positions and prepare for the application process. Counseling is conducted by giving advice rather than exploring career issues. Workshops, college courses, and special lectures also mainly deal with job search skills. In particular, these services offer simulated interview situations, where students can assess their interview skills and learn strategies to improve self-presentation.

Uniquely, career placement services also include services on the preparation for professional licenses or relevant examinations. In South Korea, employers often prefer applicants with related professional licenses (e.g., finance-related licenses, IT-related licenses) or high scores on foreign language examinations (e.g., Test of English for International Communication). For this reason, career centers provide

education on preferred professional licenses or required examinations for specific positions.

Recruiting and career fairs are an important career placement service. Career centers invited human resources managers to give information on their companies as well as the required expertise and credentials for open positions. This gives students opportunities to have accurate understanding of job openings and to network with potential employers. Internship programs offer students hands-on experiences to develop the necessary competence. Finally, on-line employment information is regularly updated for students' information.

Discussion

The results of the survey showed that individual counseling under the career exploration category and on-line employment information under the career placement category were most frequently provided. However, career center staff recognized that career exploration courses (under the former category) and recruiting and career fairs (under the latter category) were the most important ones. It implies that individual counseling for career exploration and on-line update on job opening information are routinely performed, but center staff place greater emphasis on larger-scale services such as career exploration courses or recruiting and career fairs.

Moreover, from the survey findings of both the frequency and the relative importance of services, career placement services outweigh career exploration services. It is somewhat expected because more diverse types of services are included in the category of career placement than in that of career exploration. Nevertheless, when comparing similar modalities of services (i.e., individual counseling, workshops, college courses, special lectures), career placement services still outweigh career exploration services.

Issues and Future Directions of Career Centers

Career centers in Korean higher education have shown remarkable transformation for the recent 20 years. At first, career centers only provided minimal assistance with job search as auxiliary services of other student services. However, career centers are recognized as an agency with a distinctive entity and unique roles today. Despite these expansions of structure and services, they still face challenges to meet the demands of students and society. We will discuss several issues that career centers need to address and propose future directions.

Balance between career exploration and placement services

The career services provided by career centers are disproportionate from the perspective of life-span development. Although the services include both exploration and placement services, greater emphasis is placed on career placement, leaving career exploration services secondary (J. G. Lee et al., 2007; K. Y. Park, 2009). There are two main reasons for this unbalanced configuration. First, universities place heavy emphasis on the employment rate of their graduates, as it is closely related to the university evaluation. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology publicizes the employment rate of each university every year. Since the rate is important for student recruitment, universities put much pressure on career centers to focus on improving the employment rate (K. Y. Park, 2009). Second, students perceive that the sole role of career centers is to provide placement services (Goh & Lee, 2003). It may be related to the high unemployment rate of college graduates, which create the greater needs for the services for job search and work adjustment (K. Y. Park, 2009).

However, career exploration is an equally important domain of career services. A large number of students struggle with career decision-making and fail to find careers related to their college majors

(H. J. Lee, 2002). Students recognize the need for career exploration services that can help their career decision-making and planning (Gong et al., 2005). These findings are indirect evidence that career centers have not been effectively dealing with the problems in career exploration. The shift of emphasis from placement services to a life-span development approach that includes exploration services has also been observed in the development of career centers in the United States (Wessel, 1998). Career centers in South Korea appear to become more aware of the needs for more comprehensive services that encompass the whole process of career development (J. G. Lee et al., 2007). Career centers need to make conscious effort to address career exploration issues of college students more proactively to reflect a whole spectrum of developmental tasks.

Staff expertise

Securing career center staff with expertise in career services is another issue. With the expansion of career centers, the services of career centers have become more diverse and specialized. However, the personnel that are needed to provide such services are not sufficient. Despite the structural growth, the addition of staff members was minimal, usually only 1 to 2 members (J. G. Lee et al., 2007; Lim, 2005). In addition, staff members often have limited expertise. They rarely have related certifications, and are, under university policies, often required to be transferred to other agencies after serving the career center for a certain period of time (Lim, 2005). These have been obstacles for career center staff to develop necessary expertise for service delivery.

Fortunately, universities are gradually aware of the need for the expertise of career center staff, who are exempt from the transfer (Gong, 2003). Universities can further ensure the expertise of career center staff by hiring those with related education and experiences. Offering opportunities for professional development is another way to

improve staff expertise. For example, universities may encourage staff members to pursue graduate degrees in related majors or participate in workshops.

The shortage of staff members can be addressed by hiring paraprofessionals. Although certain career services such as individual counseling should be delivered by the staff with expertise, other types of career services such as giving information on jobs, teaching résumé writing and interview skills can be provided by paraprofessionals with necessary training. In the United States, career center staff consists of not only university employees, but also practicum students, interns, and career specialists, who receive necessary training and provide services within their competence (Goh & Lee, 2003). With proper training, supervision, and designation of duties, these paraprofessionals can work effectively and reduce the workload of the professional staff so that the latter can focus on services that require their expertise.

Use of technology

An alternative to resolve the shortage of career center staff and other resources would be using Web-based services. Unfortunately, online services are only minimally provided by career centers. The most typical one is regularly updating the employment information. However, other career services can also be effectively delivered via the Internet. For example, university career centers in the United States provide self-administered career assessments, occupational information, and the strategies of job search skills along with the database of employment opportunities (Goh & Lee, 2003). In Korea, career service Websites operated by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology and the Ministry of Labor also offer similar services.

Developing Web-based career services that can address the whole scope of students' career needs has been a recent trend of career centers

(Davidson, 2001; Davidson, Heppner, & Johnston, 2001). The Web-based services have these advantages: (a) new information can be posted easily; (b) a large number of users can access; and (c) the utilization of the services can be self-directed. The active utilization of Web-based career services solution can offer ways to maximize the effective use of limited resources of the career centers. Despite numerous advantages, the use of Web-based services requires careful management. It would be important, thus, to assign staff members to be in charge of updating information, checking its accuracy, monitoring use patterns, as well as modifying online services as necessary.

Tailored programs for specialized career fields

Today, diversified and specialized career fields also impose a challenge to career centers. University career centers in Korea are centralized — a single career center serving all students in different colleges within the university system. This causes difficulties for career centers to reflect the distinct needs of students in different colleges. Career centers offer special lecture series which usually focus on specific career fields, but it is impossible to encompass the whole spectrum of the fields. Moreover, these lectures are given as a one-time presentation and lecturers are invited from the outside of the career centers, which make these special lectures as discrete events without follow-up services.

In order to respond to the distinct needs of students in diverse majors, universities can consider establishing central career centers and college-based career centers (J. G. Lee et al., 2007). College-based career centers are at a vantage point for offering occupational information and job search skills that are tailored to the features of specific colleges and developing network with alumni. When considering college-based career centers, it would be important to plan for collaboration with central career centers in advance. J. G. Lee et al. (2007) proposed that central career centers offer services for the entire

student groups such as career assessment, career development programs, and support for the college-based career centers while college-based career centers focus on specialized career exploration and placement services and the information of employment opportunities in related fields.

In conclusion, career centers in higher education in South Korea have shown remarkable development. Currently, they are established as a student service agency with unique roles and specialized services. However, they are still faced with challenges that need to be overcome in order to solidify their status within the university community. They need to take life-span development into consideration and expand the scope of services to reflect a balanced attention to both career exploration and placement. The quality of services can be further improved by increasing the expertise of staff and employing paraprofessionals. More extensive use of online services can also compliment the shortage of staff and make services more accessible to students. Finally, the establishment and collaboration with college-based career centers can help to provide career services that are tailored to students' needs in diverse majors and colleges.

Career centers need to take initiatives to address these challenges. The past progression of career centers was mainly driven by societal pressure and government intervention. The rapid increase in unemployment rate created social concerns, which led universities and the government to reform career centers in higher education. While such social influence certainly facilitated the changes in career centers, these changes have been rather reactive for resolving the immediate issues and were made without any systematic approaches or long-term visions. The current career centers have the necessary resources, though limited, to lead self-initiated changes. This would be the time for career centers to accurately assess their current status and plan for the future.

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南韓高等教育機構的職業生涯中心：
過去、現在、未來

隨着社會變遷和大學生職業生涯需要的變化，南韓的大學職業生涯中心亦不斷演變。近二十年失業率飆升，使得大學職業生涯中心的重要性更加突出；但是，完整的職業生涯服務模式尚未形成，不能反映大學生不同的職業生涯需要。本文探討南韓的大學職業生涯中心提供服務的現況。有 15 所職業生涯中心回答了有關其提供的各類服務的頻率和重要性的問卷。結果顯示，服務多集中於職業安置而非職業生涯探索，而且提供得最多的服務並不是最重要的服務。基於這些結果，本文從以下方面探討了職業生涯中心的未來工作，比如職業生涯探索與安置服務的平衡、員工的專業性、科技的應用，以及為專門的職業領域設計有針對性的服務等。

關鍵詞： 大學職業生涯中心；職業生涯服務；大學生