Widening Our Global View: The Development of Career Counseling Services for International Students

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The increased number of international students in United States universities and colleges have created the need for the development of services that appropriately reflect their needs and characteristics. The Career Center at the University of Missouri, Columbia reacted to this phenomenon by developing career services exclusively for international students. Career services are provided as individual services and online services, and consist of information on graduate schools and entrance examination practices, information on available employment opportunities and work permit policies, career assessments, and information about specific skills for obtaining a job in the United States. Several marketing strategies were used to ensure international students’ use of services. Important points in developing career services for international students are presented.

KEY WORDS: international student; career services.
The U.S. ranks first among all countries of the world in the number of international college students it hosts (Sandhu, 1994). Currently, international students in the U.S. number around half a million and the number is increasing. They represent more than 186 nationalities and attend over 2,500 institutions of higher learning across the country (Bikos & Furry, 1999). This growing number of international students has stimulated a small, but increasing body of literature addressing the general adjustment (Kaczmarek et al., 1994), the psychological needs (Sandhu, 1994), and the counseling style preferences (Leong & Chou, 1996) of international students. It has also created the need to develop career services designed to meet their unique needs.

Even though the international student population continues to increase, little research has been conducted specifically on the career needs of international students. In the 1990s, Heppner and Johnston (1994) identified eight themes career centers should consider for the future. They pointed out that previous career services have had limited success in reaching underrepresented groups and highlighted the need to attend to the increasing multi-cultural diversity of the student population: “For years most centers have tried to have policies that foster non-discrimination, that is insuring that all students would be treated equally. There is now a growing awareness of the need to go much further than equal services” (p. 180).

Although many of the services provided by Career Centers are useful to international students, there are numerous other needs that international students have that require services that are uniquely tailored to them. The Career Center located at the University of Missouri–Columbia (MU Career Center) responded to this challenge and began a new career service for international students designed to meet their specific career planning needs. This article: (a) provides a rationale for career services for international students; (b) stresses the importance of creating career services within a cultural context; (c) describes the development of career services for international students; (d) suggests various types of career services that can be provided; and (e) identifies key points that need to be considered in developing specialized career services to meet the needs of international students.

A Rationale

In developing career services for international students at the University of Missouri–Columbia it was important to recognize that students from different countries had different career needs. It was also