

Career guidance through libraries in higher educational institutions

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In the contemporary society a young person is in need of skills like the ability to communicate and get along with people and the ability to think ahead besides acquiring academic qualifications. The career life planning process empowers students to choose right career, as well as acquire skills and sharpen capabilities to acquire and manage the chosen career. Modern libraries should look out for new methods of serving the users in a better way. This paper highlights the role of libraries in providing career information services to college students. It discusses different methods to be used by the libraries to disseminate career information. The importance of providing Internet services to career seekers is also highlighted. An attempt has made to identify some of the problems faced by the libraries in providing qualitative career information services to its users and few suggestions are made to improve career information services in libraries.

Introduction

Career information services provided by libraries of higher educational institutions can be useful to students who are on the look out for jobs. The twenty first century dawned with major transformations in the structure of work and careers and the job market is more diverse and changing rapidly than ever before. As a result, the students' decisions on careers have become more complex. Students need a wide range of information and advice. The more complex the world of work and the more extensive the information available, the greater is the need for personalized, impartial guidance to help students make right choices. Career guidance is critical to students and others entering the workforce. This need has become more important in recent years with the impact of accelerating technological change, global competition etc., on work environment.

According to Sinz, "It is extremely important for colleges to offer career guidance aimed to help students make more informed and consequently better educational and career choices¹." A similar view given by Sharma states, "At the time of admission to the college, if educational guidance is provided to the pupils, many of them can be diverted towards more useful activities. This will reduce the burden on university education too. Guidance helps the pupils in selecting their subjects of specialization which help later on in choosing their vocation²."

In the contemporary society, a young person is in need of skills like the ability to communicate and get along with people and the ability to think ahead besides acquiring academic qualifications. The willingness to learn new things, to be open minded, to take on challenges, to be able to withstand pressures are essential qualities and at times these are more important than scoring high marks.

The objective of this paper is to look at career information services in higher educational institutions in India and to suggest how libraries and librarians can help the students and graduates in their choice of right career.

Career guidance movement in Indian universities

In India, employment opportunities are limited and those that are available are many a time unknown to the concerned. It was in 1956 that a Study Group on Educated Unemployed recommended the establishment of Bureaus in universities to provide their alumni with employment information and career guidance. Later, in 1957, the scheme for the setting up of the Bureaus was prepared by the Directorate General of Employment and Training. The scheme envisaged Bureaus to be primarily employment counseling agencies but they could function as placement agencies for professional and highly qualified persons.

Indian Education Commission, 1964-66 has observed in this connection: "The Employment, Information and Guidance Bureaus of the National Employment Service and the student advisory bureaus which have been existing in a number of universities have been doing useful work."³

Some of the important functions of Employment Information Bureaus are – creation of awareness among students, disseminating information, guidance to foreign students, maintaining libraries, adapting tests, research, holding orientation courses and publishing.

Although in some institutions certain aspects of the service are delivered through academic departments, traditionally career guidance has not been seen as an important element of graduates education and in most cases is not integrated into curriculum.

Beginning of guidance in colleges

After 1900, the number of college students began to increase with more and more students enrolling in institutions of higher learning. This rise in college enrollments was partly due to the improvements in economic conditions and partly due to the increased demand for graduation as minimum qualification. Because the standards of training for admission to many occupations were rising, it became more and more difficult for young untrained men to get and hold responsible jobs in such occupations.

The increased size of the classes made it difficult for the faculty members to get well-acquainted with the students. Teachers were unable to carry on the informal advisement and guidance to students that teachers had conducted almost naturally earlier. Consequently, there arose a need and a demand for organized personnel services for all college students. At present many of the colleges are having career guidance cell to provide guidance to students.

The career guidance cell offers different services to students relating to their future careers and higher studies. It provides specific career counseling in terms of job opportunities available and how to prepare and apply for such jobs. It helps students to prepare resumes/biodata/ curriculum vitae, cover letters and also prepare them for group discussion and job interviews. It also guides the

students for higher educational opportunities in India and abroad.

Role of libraries

The role played by libraries in providing career related information cannot be undermined. Bhatia states that "library is the heart of any institution. One can get information at one place within small interval of time. There should be a separate section for occupational information so that students can utilize the library more easily⁴."

Norris, et al pointed out that the library is the logical location for the storage of most of the information needed to provide career information service⁵. The library staff is trained to provide effective service and there by, can add a significant component to the guidance program which usually suffers from lack of an adequate number of staff members. However, Anderson viewed it in a different way and expressed that the library has only a partial role in career development and in reality that role is underplayed⁶. Where as McCarthy supported the idea of Norris and observed that Youth Information Officer (Ireland, Romania), Information Officer (in tertiary/higher education), and librarian have key roles to play in the given information explosion arising from the Internet, in mediating information to support guidance activities⁷.

For the effective dissemination of career information or occupational information it is necessary to have cooperation from the librarian. Librarian can contribute much towards the guidance program as he/she is in a unique position to collect, organize, retrieve and disseminate career information material to the users. The librarians of Western countries are much ahead of us in providing career information to their clientele and to create awareness of guidance. Many librarians in foreign countries have established guidance libraries, browsing tables, and special reading rooms devoted to stimulating information. At present many of the university and college libraries are having their own websites to provide career information.

Even in the present day environment, college and university libraries play only a partial role in providing career information. One can surely say that the resources available in this area has yet to be utilized fully. This can be done only with the cooperation of college

librarian and career development professionals. This will strengthen the quality of services for career guidance and it will provide more access to career information to the user.

Lynch mentioned that “career related information appear in a variety of media. Collecting, organizing and disseminating such scattered information needs appropriate planning and the use of modern technology. In the era of electronic information, librarians have to play different roles as a maintainer, interpreter, trainer, enabler, liaison and advisor⁸.”

As the librarian is knowledgeable with the techniques of current awareness service and selective dissemination of information, it would be easy for him/her to provide career information by making use of the electronic media. Present day librarians are trained in information technology so that they can make use of the fast developing Internet facility for providing effective career information services.

To prepare young people to live in the world of tomorrow librarians must collect, organize and provide access to as much information on general career guidance as possible and as much information as possible on specific careers. College catalogs, professional careers information, and even post-graduate information should be available for maximum efficiency. In addition to career-oriented information, career resources also would include materials on clothing suggestions, business etiquette, resume preparation, and interview techniques. This means that every youngster should be given an opportunity to make occupational, educational and social decisions based on valid information which has been presented at an appropriate time in his development. If this is done there will be an effective information service which all may be proud of.

College librarian has a definite role to play in the career guidance as he/she is the source of all information and he/she holds the key to the world of knowledge. Here the librarian can be the leader or can collaborate with other members in the guidance cell by helping them to get the necessary information.

Methods of disseminating career information in libraries

Information has a very significant role in helping people to make career decisions⁹. Career information appears

in a variety of media and primarily it is the responsibilities of libraries to collect, organize, retrieve and disseminate such information in an efficient and effective way. Joshi mentions that “library in its role as an information disseminating agency is at an enviable position to successfully serve its users in their career information need¹⁰.”

Career awareness service

Jalaja and Dineshan proposed for career awareness service in the library. According to the authors: “Career awareness service is a sort of reference service. It provides information regarding a particular job on request. In this sense, career awareness service is a current awareness service. It alerts the potential candidates, to the current employment opportunities in various sectors¹¹.”

The methods used in providing current awareness service can be useful for providing career awareness service too. The methodology followed in organizing the career counseling information services of the Florida University is described by Clack¹². Some of effective methods for career awareness services are – notification lists, career awareness bulletin, news paper clipping services, selective dissemination of information, etc. The success of career awareness service depends mainly on the timeliness, since the life span of such advertisements is very short. Considering this as a very responsible job, knowledgeable and efficient persons are to be put in charge of this service. If promptly and efficiently organized, this service would be the most sought after one among the information services in a library. As the modern librarian is well qualified and equipped with all technical knowledge and information he/she can play a major role in providing career awareness service in academic libraries.

Internet as a source for career information

Anderson opined that “the Internet is becoming a complementary resource tool for career planning and job searching¹³.” Regarding resources on the Internet Crumlish pointed out that “employment resources on the Internet are diverse and to get comprehensive listing of jobs and other career building information, one has to explore all its possibilities¹⁴.” The different types of career information available on the Internet are the individual company web sites, career hubs (web-based job search databases), web sites for particular types of jobs, job matching etc.

The Internet is useful for career seekers in various areas such as browsing the different web sites devoted for career related information, publishing personal resumes, communicating through e-mail etc. Libraries can sift through important sites and inform specific users about the career/job opportunities available in different companies or institutions.

In addition to other career information services in an electronic environment the library can serve the career or job seekers easily and it is fast. The Internet facility is a great boon to career seekers as it provides information about employment opportunities in a global level. Modern libraries should look out for new methods of serving the users in a better way.

Career information literacy

There is a need to create awareness among the graduates regarding how to search, evaluate, and select career information from the vast ocean of information. They should be educated about the requirement of labour market. Those who are involved in career information literacy should have some foresight to learn the future demand in the job market arena. Students, especially the first year students should have an opportunity to attend these classes/seminars to make decision about the courses to be taken and also in the selection of their future careers. Students have to learn how to search the Internet and also which are the important sites they should look in for career information. It is necessary to conduct courses in soft skills such as oral and written communication skills, resume writing, cover letter writing, web searching, sending e-mails, sending attachment files, posting of resumes in the net, etc. Present day librarians are information specialist and they are not only store keepers and providers of information but also they are teachers who can guide and direct the youngsters in all the above activities.

The role and importance of the library / librarian in the information service has an increased significance with the recent advent of innovations in the methods by which information can be made available. Modern technology has produced a wide array of mechanical system for the storage and retrieval of information that may eventually replace many of the materials and techniques of the past. Librarian can make use of computers to collect, to organize, to retrieve and to disseminate career

information to students. Multimedia innovation resulted in a rash of projects using many different approaches to career development. It is very easy to prepare PowerPoint presentations. Librarians can make use of this facility to provide career awareness service to the college students. Librarian can conduct seminars or tutorials to help the students to develop self knowledge – i.e. skills to maintain a positive self-concept, effective behaviors etc., to facilitate educational and occupational exploration – skills to enter and participate in education and training, skills to participate in work and lifelong learning, skills to locate, evaluate and interpret career information, skills to prepare, to seek, obtain, maintain and change jobs etc., and to plan careers in which to develop skills to make decisions, understanding the impact of work on individual and family life, skills to make career transition and also to have leadership skills, teamwork skills, management skills etc., so that they will become productive and efficient members of the workforce.

Conclusion

Information is at the core of career guidance and education; indeed, it tends to prevail over other guidance function. From the point of view of the client, information should lead to improved knowledge about self, about the job market, about education and training opportunities. Libraries have to make a point to extent their services to meet the particular career needs of specific groups. At present most of the academic libraries are providing career information but only few are interested in providing proper guidance to the students in the selection of careers. As an information organizer and provider librarian can play major role in career guidance activities of colleges. In conclusion one can say that quality career information services are the need of the hour to bridge the gap between education and world of work.

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