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WMU Career and Student Employment Services – present practices and future recommendations for employer relations

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Abstract

Career services offices currently find themselves in a rapidly changing environment. Due to economic hardship, students and employers are expecting more effective and fruitful engagement, and offices must create innovative solutions to provide such engagement on shrinking budgets. Career services staff charged with conducting employer relations activities are charged with brokering these relationships between employers, students, faculty and staff, and the offerings of their departments. The purpose of this study is to determine current practices for the career services offices at Western Michigan University, Oakland University, and Central Michigan University. Then, best practices identified by industry experts will be explored and analyzed. Finally, recommendations for improved services will be provided for the Employer Relations Team in Western Michigan University's Career and Student Employment Services Office.

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Introduction

The purpose of this case study of Western Michigan University Career and Student Employment Services (WMU CSES) is to examine the current practices at WMU, Central Michigan University (CMU) Career Services , Oakland University (OU) Career Services; discover what experts in the career services field consider to be best practices; find out what the future of career services might look like; and make recommendations as to how WMU CSES can modify or improve current offerings to move toward future, ideal best practices in employer relations activities and programming. The study will investigate current practices in engaging students, faculty and student organization leadership, and alumni; employer relations practices; programming; "wishes" and future plans of each career services office studied. Additionally, best practices will be explored for relationship brokering, specialized programming, and marketing, as identified in industry literature. Ultimately, the conclusion will contain recommendations, general and specific to programming, in the context of employer relations activities. Some of those recommendations will be general, and some of them will be specific to WMU CSES.

One idea on which experts agree is that the field of career services is experiencing a shift in expectations of offerings:

Certainly, we in career services are living in interesting times. There are many forces prompting change in the work we do. Consider this short list:

- The concept of the higher education bubble,

- Unexpected competitors to traditional college career services,

- The pace of technological changes,

- Greater expectations from our students, and

- The state of the economy. (Miller & Nobels, 2013, p. 36)

Even that short list is daunting in a field where time and money are, usually, severely limited. Additionally, "In today's customized world, consumers [students, employers, and all other stakeholders] expect that products and services will be personalized to their wants and needs" (Kessler, 2013, p. 38). To adapt effectively to the changing landscape of career services, offices must evaluate their current practice, look to the future, and determine what can be eliminated, modified or improved. In some instances, programs or resources can be added to the repertoire of the office. However, in a situation with limited resources, most often these needs must be met by going deeper with the services currently offered, rather than adding new programs, resources or services (Urban, 2014).

Given the increasing cost of higher education with the uncertainty of securing a worthwhile job after graduation, career services offices are expected to offer more than the traditional resume critique or self-assessment services. Offerings are expected to be personalized and fruitful, whether that is through targeted interactions with an employer or an event with program-specific advice applicable to future career options. Students are not the only stakeholders expecting personalized and effective services; employers affected by the economic depression consider their ultimate return on investment when making recruiting decisions. Those decisions range from selecting the institutions from which to recruit, to which events to attend or sponsor at an institution. All of these factors contribute to the increasing importance of employer relations activities. Staff members charged with employer relations activities are responsible at minimum for creating relationships between recruiters and career services offices.

Since many employers will send alumni back to their alma mater as recruiters, employer relations staff will find themselves engaged in alumni relations activities as well. Many recruiters wish to connect with faculty and staff members or student organizations, because they have the

most contact with students, so many employer relations staff engage in relationships building with faculty, staff and student organization leadership. Career services offices must adapt accordingly, though many times efforts are met with budgetary and human resources constraints. In those instances, career services offices must implement creative solutions, whether that is spreading employer relations activities throughout the office or handing some off to campus partners. Through all of these interactions, employer relations staff can form an idea of what programming would be most effective and fruitful to offer in order to broker these relationships between all of the stakeholders involved.

For the purposes of this case study, the term "stakeholders" refer to students, employers, faculty and staff, alumni, and any other relevant members of the university and general community. Programming encompasses any offerings from career services offices and can include career fairs, networking events, and information sessions. The definition of career services office, for this study, is an office providing career-related services to students in multiple colleges. Employer relations activity is any activity including recruiters or employers. NACE stands for the National Association of Colleges and Employers and is considered to be the leading expert organization in the field of collegiate career services. The Career Center at the WMU Haworth College of Business was purposefully excluded from this study because it serves only students in the Haworth College of Business.

Review of the Literature

The consensus from the Student Affairs Leadership Council (2012) is employer relations activities will be at the center of these networks, since staff engaging in employer relations activities are highly involved with employers and alumni (Student Affairs Leadership Council, 2012, p. 17). Much of the literature emphasized three major topics for employer relations activities and career services offices: relationship brokering, specifically with faculty, staff, and alumni; specialized programming, which benefits students, recruiters, and employers; and marketing as the most effective method to spread the message about career services' offerings and employers to the students and university community. This section will explore all three topics in depth.

Relationship Brokering

According to Glass-Starek (2013) and the Student Affairs Leadership Council (2012), when career services offices consider their strategies, they must understand that relationships with faculty, staff and alumni are key stakeholders to career services offices. If the faculty and staff are unaware of the resources available to their students or do not understand the value of the offerings from career services offices, then they will not buy into those programs or services. If alumni feel disengaged from their university or career services offices, they may be uninterested or unwilling to return and participate in programming offered by the university and career services office.

Faculty members are valuable resources for career services, and career services can bridge the gap between faculty and employers. Oftentimes, if employers desire to partner with faculty, they are either unaware of how to establish those relationships or are met with resistance. Faculty and staff can be unaware of the services – and the value of those services – offered by career services. They must be made aware of the services offered specifically for their students:

Maintain a good balance of resources and programs that will serve all academic areas. This will promote career services as a place that has something for everyone. Faculty will be more interested in your office and more apt to refer students to career services if they know you are making the effort to provide resources that meet the career-related needs of their students. (Glass-Starek, 2013, p.33)

Employers find it valuable to partner with faculty, as those relationships give them more access to students. Faculty who have working relationships with recruiters are more open to allowing them to present in class or may be more apt to promote events that would benefit their students. Career services and employer relations have the task of creating those relationships. Dan Black, director, Americas campus recruiting for Ernst & Young LLP, explains the value of recruiter relationships with faculty:

Getting in front of students is the impetus for other branding efforts deemed effective, including building relationships with faculty. 'Building relationships with faculty is absolutely critical [as a recruiter], as it provides an opportunity for us to get to know the students through classroom presentations and other faculty events, and also to stay in touch with the work [faculty] are doing in academia.' (Giordani & Collins, 2011, p. 38)

Faculty and staff should be encouraged to attend career events which provide career opportunities to their students in order to create relationships between recruiters and career services offices staff. Faculty can also participate in career services events as panelists or speakers.

Relationships with alumni are extremely beneficial for career services offices. Alumni may come back to campus to recruit, or they can be called upon to help with networking sessions

or panels. Unfortunately, sometimes alumni engagements with career services are limited to passive connections:

>Council research suggests that the current model for alumni engagement in career services is too passive. Typically, most institutions ask alumni to help by registering for the networking database. Once an alumnus completes the registration process, there is little information about next steps or upcoming opportunities. All too often, interested alumni fill out database profiles and never hear from students or the institution. (Student Affairs Leadership Council, 2012, p. 25)

Career services offices would do well to keep in touch and meaningfully engage their alumni resources. "Maintaining connections with alumni is beneficial for career services professionals as well as faculty. For career services, alumni can be a solid resource for classroom speakers and advisory board participants. Also, they are often good sources for job leads offered by their employers" (Glass-Starek, 2013, p. 32). This is especially true given the inevitable evaporation of resources currently experienced by many departments in higher education. Differently structured alumni visits – especially when the alumni are visiting in a recruiting capacity - can supplement career advising activities through resume workshops and sessions ranging from general networking to navigating career fairs.

Some universities are using alumni to create online communities for their students, which can be either for anyone wishing to join or specific by major, program, or industry. Some go as far as to turn the control of the group over to those alumni interested in managing student engagement and interaction:

>Unlike in traditional alumni clubs or affinity groups, alumni are the primary organizers of Wesleyan [University's] networking communities. When Digital Wesleyan was

formed [a digital community to link Wesleyan students and alumni from graphic design, writing and software engineering], career services partnered with institutional advancement and the President's office to organize the first event and recruited several alumni to run the community. Afterward, the career office took a hands-off approach, providing some logistical support but mainly letting the alumni take the lead in terms of organizing events and shaping discussions. (Student Affairs Leadership Council, 2012, p. 43)

Alumni support may also help supplement the time career services and employer relations have available to devote to certain student groups. If there is a group that desires or needs more attention and programming than the office can provide, brokering relationships between engaged alumni and students may be a solution:

> The Council also recommends this practice because these communities can easily be tailored to an institution's specific strengths and culture. For example, a school with a thriving arts community or a large presence in public service could focus communities on those terrains in order to broker richer interactions between students and alumni. (Student Affairs Leadership Council, 2012, p. 44)

This would allow those groups to receive the help or content they need without adding too much more work to the career services and employer relations staff. This would also expand the reach of those services geographically. If the career services office is unable to adequately assist an online education student thousands of miles away, there may be an alumnus nearby from the same program or industry that could provide more hands-on assistance.

The Student Affairs Leadership Council (2012) suggests a relatively easy way to incorporate alumni activity into the academic year: plan alumni-centered activities (such as

major-, program-, or industry-specific panels or networking events) around the times that alumni come back to the university. Since many alumni come back to visit around major events, plan these sessions around homecoming, family weekend, board meetings, and class reunions. Alumni may be more willing to come a few days earlier to campus and participate if they plan to be in town anyway.

Specialized Programming

In addition to marketing and resource availability, career services offices must adapt to meet the changing needs and demands of their target populations. Though it may be difficult at first, career services offices must adapt their traditional programming to fit the needs and consumption styles of their audiences:

> To build your brand among students and set your company apart from the competition, you need to use a variety of activities and methods, mixing high tech with high touch, on-campus and off-campus activities, and fact-to-face and virtual efforts. (Giordani & Collins, 2011, p. 40)

Some of these adaptations may include moving activities from traditional locations to newer, higher-traffic areas; condensing content to fit into five or ten minute interactions; hosting more events on the weekends or after business hours; and creating more mobile content. If career services offices adapt to the students, rather than assuming the students will make accommodations for their services, the result may be higher levels of student engagement.

Students expect personalized, fruitful programming in smaller, targeted environments. Students and recruiters both agree that large, general career fairs are still valuable, as it is an opportunity to network meet people that may not have been available otherwise. However, many students find them intimidating and employers wonder if the return on investment is worth the cost:

While the career fair is effective for reaching students en masse, more targeted events –

including information sessions – provide the opportunity to build your brand with the

right audience. Information sessions provide a forum in which you can connect with

students in a small group. (Giordani & Collins, 2011, p. 38)

In order to maximize students' time and recruiters' return on investment, more opportunities

need to be created to connect the right people in the most effective way possible, "While the

career fair is effective for reaching students en masse, more targeted events – including

information sessions – provide the opportunity to build your brand with the right audience"

(Giordani & Collins, 2011, p. 38).

These opportunities could arise from classroom presentations, which are "much more

productive than independent workshops…[as they] provide a captive and engaged audience of

students" (Glass-Starek, 2013, p. 32). By using recruiters to present in classrooms, review

resumes, conduct mock interviews, or interact with students in other, more intimate ways, the

companies "build brand recognition, but [these interactions] help career offices expand their

capacity and reach more students. [Council] interviewees suggest that students are more likely to

attend these events when they are offered by potential employers or alumni who can provide on-

the-job insight" (Student Affairs Leadership Council, 2012). The general consensus is that

traditional programming must be augmented with or modified to fit the new, smaller events

model. Staff charged with employer relations activities will be the ones organizing, coordinating,

and creating these opportunities and interactions between students, faculty and staff, and

recruiters.

Marketing/Branding

Services will go unused unless stakeholders are aware of them. The most effective way to spread the word about services offered by career services offices is through marketing and consequential brand building. According to the definition of marketing approved by the American Marketing Association Board of Directors (2013), "marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (American Marketing Association, 2013). To market successfully, an organization must first identify the elements of their marketing mix, which is "often referred to as the '4 Ps,' i.e. product, price, place and promotion. To meet customers' needs a business [or organization] must develop products to satisfy them, charge the right price, get the goods [or services] to the right place, and it must make the existence of the product known through promotion" (Business Case Studies, 2014).

One of the first steps to successful marketing is choosing the target market. This ensures that resources are used in the most effective way possible. Entrepreneur.com explains, "Your target customers are those who are most likely to buy from you [or use your service]. Resist the temptation to be too general in the hopes of getting a larger slice of the market. That's like firing 10 bullets in random directions instead of aiming just one dead center of the mark- expensive and dangerous" (Entrepreneur, 2014).

The key to successful engagement is successful marketing the ample, readily available resources that serve the entire target population, because "a multi-faceted and flexible branding approach can enable your organization to break out of the pack and make a successful impression on students – on campus and off, online and in person" (Giordani & Collins, 2011, p. 37). Career services offices must make efforts to spend energy thinking in terms of marketers in order to: 1) create programming that is attractive to students, and, 2) draw students into the office

and to the programming. Too often career services create valuable content that goes unnoticed because students are not aware of it or were not informed of it in an appealing manner.

Another necessary marketing effort is making students, faculty and staff aware that career services offices have resources for more than just the "profitable" (i.e.-business and engineering) programs. If the career services office "maintain[s] a good balance of resources and programs that will serve all academic areas…[that] will promote career services as a place that has something for everyone" (Glass-Starek, 2013, p. 33). These messages are especially valuable for career services offices that experience difficulty connecting with certain majors, programs or schools within their universities. If the office lacks resources for specific majors or programs, the students and faculty may develop the opinion that career services only serves "profitable" programs and ignores those programs without a clear career trajectory. Though it may be difficult at first, career services offices must adapt their traditional messages and delivery to fit the needs and consumption styles of their audience, because "the key is to be consistent in your message" (Giordani & Collins, 2011, p. 40). If the message stays consistent, there is a greater opportunity for the message to be received properly by the target audience.

Methods

To address the current employer relations activities and practices within career services offices, a total of six unstructured interviews were conducted with career services professionals from WMU CSES, OU Career Services, and CMU Career Services. From Western Michigan University, in-person interviews were conducted with Lynn Kelly-Albertson, Executive Director; Ewa Urban, Associate Director of Assessment and Technology; Buffy Nespodzany, Assistant Director for Employer Relations and Job Development; and Julie Carr, Career Development Specialist. From Oakland University, an in-person interview was conducted with Wayne Thibodeau, Director. From Central Michigan University, a phone interview was conducted with Julia Sherlock, Director. All of the in-person interviews were conducted in the person's office, and the phone interview was conducted by calling her on the landline phone in my home.

An interview guide was pulled from the 2009 *NACE Professional Standards for College and University Career Services Evaluation Workbook* (NACE Workbook), which was the "Employment Services" section, consisting of criteria 38-43, found on page 10. This work and section were selected because the workbook was published by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), which is regarded as an expert organization in the collegiate career services field. The workbook was published to help evaluate the effectiveness of career services offices in terms of their students' future career successes. The document is designed to be used by career services offices to self-evaluate current services and programming, and the section selected to be used during the unstructured interviews is meant to be used during the evaluation of employer relations activities and procedures. Because the interviews were intentionally unstructured, conversations were encouraged to form around each criterion, rather than using the criteria to strictly evaluate the services and programming offered from each office.

This document was sent via email at least one day before the interviews took place each interviewee. In the email containing the interview guide, a short explanation of the thesis topic as well as the general goals for the interviews were provided. In addition to the information provided in the emails, each interviewee received similar, verbal, explanations at or shortly after the beginning of each interview. The unstructured interviews with Julie Carr, Julia Sherlock, and Wayne Thibodeau were recorded using an Android phone, and, due to sudden, irreparable data corruption, the interview recordings were lost. However, the detailed notes taken during those interviews still exist. Unstructured interviews with Buffy Nespodzany, Lynn Kelly-Albertson, and Ewa Urban were recorded with an RCA brand handheld recording device.

The NACE Workbook is organized in a manner that asks the person using it to rate their office on a scale 1-3 in terms of how well the services offered fulfill each category. However, instead of using the section provided for interviewing to rate the office's services on that scale, it was used as a prompt to talk about the services offered by the office. During the unstructured interviews, many conversations expanded beyond discussing strictly what was being evaluated on the workbook section. Questions were asked and topics addressed that came up naturally in the course of conversation. Additional questions asked include: how long each director had been with the career services offices and for how long they were director; who their "other designated clients" were, if any; under what department (student or academic affairs) the office was housed; and the organizational structure of the office. Please refer to Appendix A for the interview guide and Appendix B other questions asked during the unstructured interviews.

Sample

The three university career services offices chosen for this study are: Western Michigan University Career and Student Employment Services (WMU CSES); Oakland University (OU) Career Services; and Central Michigan University (CMU) Career Services.

WMU CSES was chosen mainly for three reason: WMU CSES serves multiple colleges; WMU CSES is housed under Student Affairs; and because I have worked there for five years in three capacities, the last being the Employer Relations Assistant for Events and Outreach and Co-Chair for The Career Fair 2014. WMU offers 240+ academic programs to 25,000 students, which includes 71 graduate programs, 30 of which result in doctoral degrees. Lynn Kelly-Albertson has been in CSES for 30 years and has been the executive director for nearly 20 of them. She reports to the vice president of Student Affairs. WMU CSES is located in a building housing department such as the Center for Academic Success Programs, Multicultural Affairs and International Student Services, though those departments report to the provost and president, rather than the vice president of Student Affairs (Western Michigan Unviersity, 2014).

WMU CSES employs eight full-time staff members and 22 part-time student staff. The eight full-time staff include: one executive director; two career development specialists; two associate directors; one assistant director for employer relations and job development; one student employment coordinator; and one office manager. Of the 21 part-time student staff, three are graduate assistants (who assist with advising and event organization); one coordinates the career coaches (who give presentations and critique documents); four are career coaches; two assist Career Development Specialists with advising and/or administrative tasks; one posts jobs, internships and other opportunities to the BroncoJOBS website; one serves as a graphic designer; one manages WMU CSES's online presence; one completes employment verifications for current and former student employees; three comprise the Employer Relations Team; four staff

the reception desk; and four assist with advising in the Career Zone, which provides drop-in services (Career and Student Employment Services Organizational Structure, 2014).

OU was chosen because their Career Services office is housed under the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, and it is physically located in a building with other student affairs offices, such as Financial Aid, the First-Year Advising Center, and the Center for Multicultural Initiatives. OU offers 260 degree and certificate programs to more than 20,000 students. Wayne Thibodeau has worked in Career Services for eleven years, and he has been director for nine (Thibodeau, 2014). OU Career Services employs 11 full-time staff members and 13 part-time staff members. The 11 full-time staff members include: one director, two associate directors; one employer relations consultant; one IT specialist; three career consultants; and three office assistants. The 13 part-time staff members include: one career event coordinator (who is not a student); one student IT intern; one student marketing intern; and ten student career ambassadors (Oakland University, 2014).

CMU was chosen because their Career Services office is housed under Enrollment & Student Services, and they are physically located in a building with other Student Services offices such as Academic Advising & Assistance, Enrollment & Student Services, and Residence Life. CMU offers more than 200 academic programs through doctoral level to over 20,000 students (Sherlock, 2014). Julia Sherlock has worked for the department and been the director for 21 years. CMU Career Services employs seven full-time staff members and is supported by 27 student volunteers. The full-time staff members include: one director; one associate director; one assistant director; two career coaches; one "administrative support, recruitment services" position; and one executive secretary (Central Michigan University, 2014). The 27 student volunteers conduct document critiques and run the Mock Interview program (Sherlock, 2014).

Data Analysis

The total minutes of interviews is estimated at 400, or 6.67 hours, estimated by adding the total minutes of captured recordings and the educated guess of total minutes of lost recordings. No transcripts were produced from any of the recordings. Data was gathered by reviewing physical notes taken during the lost interviews and by listening to recordings of the captured interviews. During the review of the data, five major themes developed: student engagement, faculty and staff engagement, alumni engagement, employer relations, programming, and two subthemes developed: wishes and future plans. All information fit into those categories, and no other categories arose from the data. The following section describes these themes in detail.

Results

Themes developed from the data are: student engagement, faculty and staff engagement, alumni engagement, employer relations, programming, and the subthemes of wishes and future plans. Student engagement includes the use of technology, publications, programming, presence at orientation and other events, and advising practices to engage the student bodies. Faculty and staff engagement includes the strategies for building and critique of partnerships with faculty and staff members within the universities. Alumni engagement examines the extent to which the career services offices leverage their alumni connections. The employer relations section compares and contrasts practices for engaging and utilizing recruiters and employers at each university. The programming section examines offerings through each career services office and the methods used to create and deliver programming. Wishes and future plans include the visions each office wishes to fulfill as well as upcoming changes expected by each office.

Current Practices: Student Engagement

All three universities and career services offices rely heavily on technology to engage and communicate with their student populations. In addition to the use of technology, the career services offices engage and communicate with their students through programming, publications, presence at orientation activities, and advising. The director of OU Career Services explained that their other designated clients included the immediate public, university community, faculty, alumni, and employers (Thibodeau, 2014). The director of CMU Career Services determined that their "other designated clients" were mostly faculty, alumni and employers (Sherlock, 2014). The executive director of WMU CSES explained that currently enrolled students are the primary audience for WMU CSES's resources, and so that is upon whom resources are focused (Kelly-Albertson, 2014).

Social Media: All three schools rely heavily on social media as a means by which to communicate with students about jobs, career and networking events, campus activities and other related opportunities. The career services all have Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter accounts, which are the accounts used most often for communication. The CMU and WMU career services offices have Google + accounts, and OU has a general Google + account. These accounts do not appear to be utilized as often as the Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter accounts, but they have content related to information for students about services and programming. CMU also has an Instagram, where they post pictures of their staff and flyers for their events.

OU career services offices has a YouTube channel. The topics of their videos range from tips for behavioral interviewing, how to create video resumes, students' experiences in internships, to how to leverage LinkedIn. CMU career services has a video in the "Discover Central. Discover You." series on CMU's general YouTube channel, which explains the services offered to students by the Career Services office. Neither WMU nor WMU CSES have channels, and the only career-related video on YouTube was created two years ago for a specific series for 2012 graduating seniors. All interviewees acknowledged a universal struggle in communicating through social media: the message only spreads to people who follow the page, and it is hard to make students aware of these pages.

Emails: W. Thibodeau (2014), J. Sherlock (2014), and L. Kelly-Albertson (2014) all confirmed that all offices communicate with students via email. Though staff may communicate with students personally via email, mass emails are sent through the job sites at each university. Normally, these emails go to students in relevant majors or programs and alert them to job or internship opportunities on the site or career and networking events that are occurring.

Programming: W. Thibodeau (2014), J. Sherlock (2014), and L. Kelly-Albertson (2014) all confirmed that all offices coordinate or support events, which range from small, program-specific networking events, employer-led information sessions, to large career fairs. The purpose for all events is to provide students with tools, connections and opportunities through which to acquire and develop skills applicable to future careers. All three schools have their events listed on their websites, and OU Career Services' events are also posted to the general University Calendar. OU and CMU have Mock Interview programs, and WMU has an Employer on Duty program. These focus solely on providing interviewing experience for students. What normally happens in a student is interviewed by a career services employee or by a recruiter using authentic interview questions, and, at the end, they receive feedback on their resume (if applicable) and their interview. The interviewer identifies strengths and areas for improvement.

Networking sessions occur frequently at the Parkview Engineering and Applied Sciences (CEAS) campus, and Julie Carr, career development specialist for the CEAS, takes groups of students to different employer sites throughout the semester. These visits are designed to increase brand exposure for companies that hire WMU CEAS students but also to familiarize students with specific industries. Depending on what majors the companies tend to hire, the visits may be open to any CEAS major or might be restricted to one or two specific majors. On the trip to the employer site, the career development specialist and the graduate assistant talk to the students about professional behavior, relevant questions to ask the employer, and other things of that nature. On the trip back to campus, they debrief the trip and talk about what they took away from the visit (Carr, 2014).

Publications: CMU and WMU career services offices publish a similar booklet that serves as a guide to the aspects of career search and development. CMU calls theirs *Career*

Guide and WMU calls theirs *Career Development Guide*. Major topics in each include: self-assessment, career exploration, job search strategies, and interviewing skills. Both are available in print and online (Central Michigan University, 2014; Western Michigan University, 2014).

OU produces a booklet called *Job Search, Informational Interviews & Networking*, which focuses on job search strategies, informational interviews, networking, researching companies and 30 second personal commercials. That is available physically and online. In addition to that publication, the OU Career Services webpage has a section called "Career Prep," which has sections titled, "The Search," "Before the Interview," "The Interview," and "Follow-Up." Each section has tips related to the job search process, and there is not any emphasis on self-assessment. This may be due to the fact that there is a link to a "What can I do with my major?" resource located on the OU Career Services website (Oakland University, 2014).

Orientations: Both WMU and OU career services offices are stops on the university orientation tours for first-year students. WMU career services staff give a 3-5 minute presentation. WMU and OU also have the opportunity to address transfer students at their orientations (Thibodeau, 2014; Urban, 2014). At this time, CMU does not have presence at orientation events, though their services are mentioned at the Residence Life stop on the first-year orientation tours (Sherlock, 2014).

Advising: OU and CMU offer career advising to currently enrolled students and alumni without restriction, while WMU offers career advising to currently enrolled students and alumni who have been graduated for no longer than two years. Neither OU nor CMU receive assistance from alumni services to provide advising.

The OU advising staff members are referred to as consultants, and there are three of them. They have a team of ten student employees who handle appointments for document critiques and

conduct mock interviews with students. This allows the consultants to focus on helping students transition into their post-graduation activity. If a student needs any further assistance outside of what the consultants offer, the student is referred to the First Year Advising Center (for help choosing a major) or the campus counseling services (Thibodeau, 2014).

The CMU advising staff members are referred to as Career Coaches, and there are two of them. The director advises alumni and Global Campus students. They have a team of about 20 student volunteers who conduct mock interviews and critique documents. This, again, allows the coaches to handle appointments focused more on post-graduation activity, such as pursuing full-time employment or graduate school. The coaches also help administer general aptitude tests, such as the MBTI. Additionally, if a student needs help discovering future career interests to help choose a major, the coaches will assist them. If a student requires any further counseling outside general aptitude tests or general self-exploration, the student is referred to the campus counseling services (Sherlock, 2014).

The WMU advising staff members are referred to as career development specialists, and there are three of them. Career development specialists, graduate assistants and career coaches provide advising in Ellsworth Hall in one of two ways: all three groups provide 20 minute drop-in advising appointments in the Career Zone, which is a space specifically for drop-in advising and smaller programming. Topics addressed in those short appointments include document critiques, interview tips and job search strategies. Career development specialists also provide hour-long appointments for students that require assistance with self-assessment, career exploration or more in-depth work with documents or searching. At the Parkview Engineering and Applied Sciences campus, the career development specialist for the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences and a graduate assistant provide shorter drop-in advising sessions in

addition to hour-long appointments. If a student needs more help than what the members of the advising team are able to offer, they are referred to their academic department (for help choosing a major) or the campus counseling services (Carr, 2014; Kelly-Albertson, 2014; Urban, 2014).

Current Practices: Faculty and Staff Engagement

OU career services staff find faculty engagement to consist of working with those faculty members that believe in the mission of career services and see the value of them for their students. Additionally, their office has partnerships with their first-year experience programs and classes. This allows them to have presentation time in those classes and engage the first-year students. Outside of that partnership at OU, the career coaches are mandated to spend about one-third of their time interacting and creating relationships with faculty in their assigned colleges and programs. Only a handful of programs at OU require an internship, so Career Services has relied on faculty to communicate the importance of experiential learning. Most of the time, the faculty make the effort to help either connect the students to Career Services or a specific employer to take advantage of those opportunities (Thibodeau, 2014).

CMU Career Services staff have a very strong relationship with the faculty, to the point where, if the Career Services staff come to a department with a vision, the department will more often than not provide them with any and all support necessary. CMU Career Services has created and spread the idea the career services happens everywhere on campus, and the CMU faculty have really taken that to heart. For example, about 15% of all on-campus interviews take place independently from the Career Services office, where the recruiter organizes the interviews directly with the faculty and staff within academic departments (Sherlock, 2014).

The relationships between WMU CSES staff and faculty is generally strong, but requires rejuvenation following a major staff turnover four years ago. One specific area of focus for this

rejuvenation will be the College of Arts and Sciences. WMU CSES has hired a new career development specialist for that college, and part of her job will be to strengthen old and create new relationships with the academic advising staff and faculty (Kelly-Albertson, 2014; Urban, 2014). The career development specialist for the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences (CEAS) being located in the Parkview CEAS campus provides an opportunity to be easily accessible by the faculty and staff in the building (Carr, 2014). In addition to faculty and staff ties within each college, WMU CSES has a partnership with the First Year Experience program, which includes presentations by WMU CSES staff in each First Year Experience class (Urban, 2014).

The most recent data available regarding programs offered in classrooms or for campus groups comes from the "2011-2012 Career and Student Employment Annual Report." Within the College of Arts and Sciences, WMU CSES delivered 17 presentations in classes spanning nine schools and departments, and they supported one event. In the College of Education and Human Development, WMU CSES delivered 15 presentations in classes spanning three schools. For the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences, WMU CSES delivered 30 presentations in classes spanning seven academic programs, and they supported five programs. For the College of Health and Human Services, WMU CSES delivered 19 presentations spanning four schools, and they supported one program. WMU CSES supported two programs in the Lee Honors College, three programs for the Graduate College, and two programs in the College of Aviation. Additionally, WMU CSES delivered 21 co-curricular programs to 19 organizations (co-curricular programs defined as "delivered in collaboration with campus groups"); and they delivered 69 programs to 34 groups "in support of WMU programs and services" (Western Michigan University Career

and Student Employment Services, 2012, p. 22-30). This data shows that, though some

relationships may require rejuvenation, the ties that exist currently are very strong.

Current Practices: Alumni Engagement

None of the three offices have active outreach to alumni at this point. All of the

professionals interviewed noted that alumni will return to engage in recruiting activities, but that

tends to be a decision the employer made or a request from the alumnus. OU has a group on

LinkedIn in which alumni can sign up to be mentors at the request of a student, faculty, or staff

member. CMU does not have a formal group on a social network, but the director is currently

working with the director of alumni relations (with whom she has a strong relationship) to create

one. WMU has a mentoring group on LinkedIn and a program through the job posting website.

Though at some events alumni may receive a pin, WMU CSES has no active engagement

strategy with alumni at events. However, the Office of Alumni Relations and Development is

currently working with WMU CSES to have a presence at career events to connect with

recruiters who are alumni. They were very present at Aviation Outlook Day, which took place on

April 4, 2014 (Thibodeau, 2014; Sherlock, 2014; Kelly-Albertson, 2014).

Current Practices: Employer Relations

All three career services offices share some similar employer relations practices. They all

have a site onto which employers or career services staff can post internship and job

opportunities. All three offices have a specific point of contact for employers so as to streamline

the amount of searching and communication required by the employer in order to engage with

the office (Thibodeau, 2014; Sherlock, 2014; Kelly-Albertson, 2014).

OU has an employer relations consultant to serve as the point of contact for new

employers. When an employer requests access to OU's job posting site, they receive a message

explaining the four most effective ways to engage with students at Oakland University. In addition to sending that message after employer access requests, OU Career Services will send it as a reminder two or three times per year or if an employer needs a reminder (Thibodeau, 2014).

CMU assigns each staff member one or two groups of employers to each staff member (who then puts the employers in touch with relevant faculty), with their executive secretary serving as the point of contact for new employers. All of the employer relations points of contact are responsible for either attending to the needs of the employers or directing them to the person (either inside or outside of the office) who can best serve them (Sherlock, 2014).

Part of the concept that employer relations takes place anywhere on campus means that faculty are empowered to broker relationships between their departments, employers, and students. There are some faculty members that prefer the relationship to be managed by Career Services staff, but, after being introduced, the recruiters tend to communicate exclusively with relevant faculty (Sherlock, 2014).

Buffy Nespodzany, the assistant director for employer relations and job development at WMU CSES, currently works with three employer relations assistants, who are part-time student employees. She serves as the point of contact for employers interested in hiring all majors outside of those offered in the Haworth College of Business (Nespodzany, 2014). The career development specialist for the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences is in a unique situation. She balances employer relations activities on top of her time spent advising students. WMU has seen an influx of employers wanting to recruit students from that college since the recovery of the economy. Additionally, her predecessor spent the majority of his time visiting and networking with employers. Therefore, many of the employers learned to communicate

directly with the career development specialist for that college, instead of communicating with someone on the Employer Relations Team (Carr, 2014).

Because the career development specialist for the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences is located in the Parkview Campus, which is four miles away from main campus, one of the responsibilities is organizing the employer visits and networking sessions that would normally be taken care of by someone on the employer relations team on main campus. There is a student assistant available to support her employed through the college. She and a graduate assistant also organize the Engineering Expo, which is the second-largest event organized by WMU CSES. Unlike The Career Fair in February, which is organized in the Ellsworth Hall office on main campus, she does not have direct access to people who could help ease the load of organizing that event to give her more time to advise students. As can be expected, as the event draws closer, more students want her attention. Someone to handle logistics of that event would allow her to have more time to advise her students while also allowing her time to network with faculty and employers (Carr, 2014). All career development specialists are expected to create connections with faculty and staff, advise students and organize events, and the career development specialist position is unique in that it is removed from the main office and the Employer Relations Team (Kelly-Albertson, 2014).

Current Practices: Programming
All interviewees confirmed that similar employer-involved programming is offered through all three offices and includes:

- Information sessions, at which the recruiter can give informational presentations to groups of students. These can either take place with a mixed group or major/program-specific group of students;

- Information tables, which are placed in high-traffic areas, at which recruiters can speak quickly to students in passing and offer informational materials;

- Smaller, major/program-specific networking events organized either solely by the career services offices, by faculty or student groups, or a combination thereof;

- Large, non-major/program-specific career events.

The extent to which the career services offices are involved in these events varies by university. On one end, WMU CSES organizes all programming – including information sessions and events - for all colleges other than the Haworth College of Business. Some smaller events, such as the Aviation Outlook Day and Nursing Networking Day, may be supported by student organizations or academic departments, but the planning, organization and execution take place within the CSES office (Nespodzany, 2014).

OU has a fairly equal balance between events organized by their Career Services and those organized by student organizations, faculty, alumni and employers. The director of OU Career Services just hired a career event coordinator to work 19 hours a week exclusively organizing the logistics of events, which has allowed their career consultants to spend more time with students and their assistant directors to spend more time creating and leveraging relationships with employers (Thibodeau, 2014).

CMU Career Services, on the other end, only has one program organized entirely by their office – the Education Fair. They collaborate with the College of Business Administration and Alpha Kappa Psi to organize the large fairs in the fall and spring semesters, and they buy food for the School of Cinematic Arts fair organized by the college. Due to their "employer relations happens anywhere on campus" culture, the majority of the employer relations activity takes place elsewhere (Sherlock, 2014).

WMU CSES spreads event organization through the department. The assistant director of employer relations and job development and the employer relations team organize the large Career Fair in February (which is the largest non-athletic event that takes place at WMU), the Employer on Duty program, employer information and networking sessions, and they support other career events organized by the department. The career development specialist for the Colleges of Aviation, and Health and Human Services and a student assistant organize the Aviation Outlook Day, Nursing Networking Event and the Social Services Fair. The associate director for outreach and two graduate assistants organize the Teacher Education Fair. The career development specialist for the College of Arts and Sciences supports the Michigan Association of Broadcasters Career Fair. The career development specialist and graduate assistant for the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences organize the Engineering Expo, related networking events and employer site visits. The associate director of employer relations and job development and the employer relations team are represented at each of those events (excluding the employer site visits and most of the networking events taking place within the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences) to network with recruiters (Nespodzany, 2014).

Interviews with W. Thibodeau (2014), J. Sherlock (2014) and B. Nespodzany (2014) revealed that all three career services offices offer a mock interview program. OU and CMU have a formalized program in which either their student staff or graduate assistants or recruiters from different employers conduct the interviews. CMU has the farthest-reaching mock interview program – 27 volunteer interns (along with occasional recruiters) conduct around 2000 interviews per semester. WMU implemented the Employer on Duty program at the beginning of the Spring 2014 semester, in which recruiters come and conduct 30 minute mock interviews for a time block of their choosing. This program was created in response to employer feedback.

Employers reported that candidate resumes looked better than average, but they were concerned when candidates that looked good on paper were unable to sell themselves during interviews.

In addition to mock interviews, all three offices provide space for recruiters who would like to conduct interviews with candidates to fill positions within the company. The OU Career Services and WMU CSES employer relations team organize all of those interviews (Thibodeau, 2014; Nespodzany, 2014). Since the Parkview CEAS campus lacks interview space, employer hiring engineers must conduct interviews in the main campus offices in Ellsworth Hall (Carr, 2014). At CMU, the Career Services office organizes about 85% of intent-to-hire interviews. Due to the unusually high demand for their graduates in physical therapy, physician assistant, and speech pathology and audiology (which all have 100% placement rates at the time of this research), those interviews are organized between recruiters and faculty in those degrees (Sherlock, 2014).

Wishes

The director of OU Career Services would like to expand his facilities as well as his mock interview program. And, as he imagines everyone feels, he would love to have more resources in general. Though, he does acknowledge that money is tight within higher education in the state of Michigan (Thibodeau, 2014).

The Director of CMU Career Services would like to be able to hire someone to assess the whole student – their likes and dislikes, passions, whose voice they hear while making major decisions, etc – and help them gain a holistic understanding of their self and how to apply that to a program or career. She would like to be able to hire someone to focus on alumni advising and building an alumni mentoring network. The last hire she would like to make is someone to leverage their marketing collateral and spread their message deeper into campus as well as into the surrounding community (Sherlock, 2014).

The executive director, L. Kelly-Albertson (2014), associate director for assessment and technology, E. Urban (2014), and assistant director for employer relations and job development , B. Nespodzany (2014), at WMU CSES would like to see the expansion of the Employer on Duty Program and a rejuvenation of the relationships between WMU CSES and the College of Arts and Sciences. Additionally, if resources become available, the executive director, the career development specialist for the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences, and administration within the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences would like to hire someone to conduct employer relations activities exclusively for that college (Kelly-Albertson, 2014).

The assistant director for employer relations and job development, B. Nespdzany (2014), would like to pursue partnerships between WMU CSES and highly-involved employers that would also include sponsorship – monetarily and through participation in events - of the office by those employers. She wants to work closely with the new career development specialist for the College of Arts and Sciences to introduce the benefits of the employer relations team to those faculty and staff. She hopes this results in higher engagement with that college and its students. Additionally, one wish that the career development specialist for engineering and applied sciences, J. Carr (2014) expressed was more support from the Employer Relations Team to help her balance her load of employers, students and event planning. Both B. Nespodzany (2014) and J. Carr (2014) wish to have someone of staff to handle logistics for The Career Fair and Engineering Expo to give them more time to network with employers, faculty and staff, and alumni, and advise students (Nespodzany, 2014; Carr, 2014).

Future Plans

The Director of OU Career Services plans to continue expanding their Mock Interview program. The university is considering implementing more required internships into more programs. If that is the case, they will work with OU Career Services to help students find those

internships and experiential learning opportunities. Additionally, there is talk of the School of Business Administration wanting to have their own career services offices to serve only those students, though nothing yet has come of that (Thibodeau, 2014).

CMU Career Services is currently hiring a career coach for Global Campus students to work in the Metro Detroit area. A large concentration of their Global Campus population is located in that area, and, in addition to serving students, that career coach would also have employer relations responsibilities with employers in the Metro Detroit region. Additionally, one of CMU Career Services current initiatives is organizing a formal mentoring program with alumni through LinkedIn (Sherlock,, 2014).

WMU CSES will be applying for a grant to secure funding to expand the current Employer on Duty program to reach more students. Additionally, the assistant director for employer relations and job development and the associate director for assessment and technology, in conjunction with the career development specialist for the College of Arts and Sciences, plan to engage faculty and staff encouraging them to add a resume review or a mock interview as assignments for classes (Nespodzany, 2014; Urban, 2014). If this is successful, then the assistant director for employer relations and job development and the employer relations team will engage more employers to either participate in Employer on Duty or conduct resume reviews. WMU just hired Chris Praedel, Assistant Manager of Engagement for the Department of Development and Alumni Relations, who will be in charge of Alumni Stewardship programs. The two of them will work closely to engage alumni who are employers or recruiters (Nespodzany, 2014).

The assistant director of employer relations and job development, B. Nespodzany (2014), plans to pursue employer sponsorships in order to secure funds to offer more programming. She

plans to follow the model currently executed by The Career Center at the Haworth College of Business. The Career Center is sponsored by ten Premier Partners. Their sponsorship provides more resources to allocate toward programming for students. There are different sponsorship packages that each include different services provided in return for the sponsorship (Career Center Premier Partner Program, 2014). The assistant director for employer relations and job development, B. Nespodzany (2014), is currently creating sponsorship packages and identifying potential organizations with which to partner. Furthermore, she would like to implement employer site visits for students in the College of Arts and Sciences in the style currently practiced by the career development specialist and graduate assistant for the College of Arts and Sciences.

The College of Engineering and Applied Sciences (CEAS) recognizes the influx of employers wanting to recruit their students, and they are interested, if funds can be secured, to spend money to help hire an employer relations specialist for the CEAS to support the career development specialist for the CEAS. With someone handling the employer relations activity for that college, Buffy Nespodzany will have greater opportunity to seek out and cultivate relationships with employers who hire students from the College of Arts & Sciences. This will also give her more opportunity to increase the number of internships posted to the BroncoJOBS website, which was one the goals expressed when she was hired (Nespodzany, 2014; Urban, 2014).

Recommendations and Conclusion

This section will synthesize information garnered from the literature and data collected from the interviews conducted with career services professionals. It will be followed first by general recommendations for career services office and employer relations professionals, then by recommendations specific to WMU CSES.

General Recommendations

Employer relations and career advising staff members alike must involve themselves in building relationships with faculty and student organization leadership, who have the most exposure to students overall. To effectively conduct future employer relations activities with the intent of creating these networks, one of two things must happen: 1) only one person in the career services office is charged with brokering relationships between students, faculty, staff and employers, or 2) all staff are trained in this activity and have assigned students, industries or employers, faculty and staff with whom to broker relationships. No matter which option is exercised, communication and cooperation between all parties within the career services office is key.

It is the opinion of the author that, though responsibilities within roles should be clearly defined, cooperation between different groups in the office should be encouraged. For example, if an office wanted to create a new skills-articulation program for a specific sub-section of the student population, cooperation between the advising staff members and the employer relations members would be beneficial to the students. The advising staff would know what content needed to be included, and the employer relations staff could provide either, 1) helpful feedback from employers regarding what they look for from new graduates in the marketplace, or 2) recruiters willing to help during the event.

In order to maximize recruiters' return on investment and provide a premium experience for students, the traditional structure of programming needs to be adapted. Although recruiters still appreciate general career fairs, where they can interact with large amounts of students with whom they may not have interacted otherwise, the majority of their time is better spent meeting with students that have an interest in and the skill sets necessary for the career paths the employer provides. Students appreciate larger career events, because they may discover employers hiring for their program or skills set that they had not known about previously. However, students find it easier to approach and interact with recruiters and/or alumni who have something specific to offer them, whether it be industry-specific career advice or information about an employer with whom they want to work.

More relationships need to be created with faculty and staff, and they need to be nurtured and grown after first contact. Through those relationships, the faculty and staff will learn about the variety and importance of the programming career services offices offers for their students. Since, oftentimes, different levels of faculty and staff have different levels of reception regarding working relationships with other members of the university, differentiated messages are crucial. Most faculty, especially at a research university, are resistant to someone coming into their area of expertise and telling them to include information about or incorporate elements of career services into their classes. So, for the faculty that fit that stereotype, a less formal partnership may be appropriate, and the extent of the direct communication about career services may be providing them with resources without any suggestion as to how to incorporate them into their material. For staff or part-time instructors, especially those who receive less information about university resources, the conversation may involve more strategy for incorporating career services into their courses in addition to the general information about services provided.

Though employers should not overly impact what career services offices teach their students, the feedback that staff charged with employer relations duties receive regarding quality of students' documents, interviewing skills and overall candidacy should be communicated to the advising staff. That information can be incorporated into advising. Likewise, concepts that the advising staff members communicate to students, or areas that are identified as needing significant improvement within the students being advised, could drive the programming created by the department. Recruiters and/or alumni can be included in this sort of programming to bring industry and real-world advice to the students. This would create a synthesis between what employers are looking for and what we are teaching the students. When successful relationships are created between faculty and staff and those recruiters and alumni involved on campus, the messages that faculty or recruiters deliver to students carry more weight from those validations. The resources and messages from career services offices carry more weight as well. Students see that those stakeholders are working together to deliver a consistent message that there are options for them in their program or major, and they are more likely to partake in services offered to them.

The opinion of the author is that a good first step for any career services office is identifying their target market and creating basic marketing mix analyses for each major stakeholder group. Major stakeholder groups could include: students, faculty and staff, alumni, and employers. By identifying the target market and creating marketing mix analyses, the office can then decide where to allocate resources and what programming to create, eliminate, or in which programming to invest. Identifying the target market would also help create employer relations strategies by identifying which employers in which industries to pursue and how to effectively utilize faculty, alumni, and recruiter support to reach the target market. By

completing marketing mix analyses, the employer relations staff would have a better idea of what services are of value to which stakeholder groups in addition to understanding how best to communicate that value.

Another major benefit of proper marketing will be brand recognition. Once the marketing strategy for each stakeholder group has been formalized and communicated to the career services offices staff, a consistent brand will be delivered to each group. If the message stays consistent, the message will stick with the consumer strongly and for a longer period of time. A positive brand image will result in word-of-mouth advertising, which is some of the most effective advertising. That word-of-mouth advertising, created through branding resulting from the planned marketing strategies, will increase the number of people from each stakeholder group utilizing the career services office and their services.

Recommendations for Western Michigan University Career and Student Employment Services

Given the enormity of interoffice cooperation and cooperative engagement with all stakeholders, roles and tasks must be clearly defined and adhered to within career services offices. For example, what role should the career development specialist for the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences play at the WMU College of Engineering and Applied Sciences? Should that person be critiquing resumes and administering self-assessments, should they be spreading the message about CSES to faculty and staff, or should they be actively seeking and brokering relationships with employers interested in her students? If they are to focus on all of those activities, then it should be approximated how much time should be spent on each activity. If they should only be focusing on advising, then they will require someone to assist her with brokering relationships with employers and communicating with faculty. If financial assistance being offered by the college can be secured in the future, WMU CSES may

be able to hire an employer relations specialist to assist the career development specialist for the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences by helping students network with employers and faculty, and they will be able to return to their original duties of advising.

Another example of a necessity for role definition is with the role of Assistant Director for Employer Relations and Job Development. Buffy Nespodzany was hired to engage in employer relations activities but also to co-coordinate The Career Fair with the Employer Relations Team. Planning for The Career Fair begins in August for the event that takes place mid-February. Starting in late November, the majority of the effort of the Assistant Director for Employer Relations and Job Development and the Employer Relations Team are concentrated on planning The Career Fair, to the point where all active employer relations engagement ceases. The only new relationships being formed are ones that happen when an employer approaches any of the employer relations staff, because there is very little time to seek out new ones. If the employer relations staff is to spend the majority of their time on employer relations activities, such as seeking out new partnerships or increasing internship opportunities for students, then something needs to change. Two possible options are, 1) hiring someone to organize The Career Fair, or 2) reassign that event to a department or student organization outside of CSES.

The Director at OU Career Services has experienced great success hiring someone to work 19 hours per week whose sole responsibility is to organize the logistic of events for the department. This gives the staff more time to network with employers, faculty, and students. Pursuing this option would take events off of the CDSs plates in WMU CSES to give them more time to network with faculty and advise students. The Director of Career Services at CMU has found that two approaches work for organizing their events: partnering with campus departments and organizations, or handing over the entire event and its responsibilities to a separate on-

campus entity. That gives her staff, and would give WMU CSES staff, more time to network with employers, faculty, and students. The Aviation Outlook Day is on its way to being taken over by the College of Aviation and its student organization, as is Nursing Networking Day in the Bronson School of Nursing. In those instances, WMU CSES could serve in a consulting capacity as the events are absorbed by those entities until they are comfortable running them independently. If the executive director of WMU CSES desires that the CDSs maintain contact with employers and faculty, then hiring someone part-time to coordinate logistics for events would be an excellent option.

As it stands, the number of new relationships being formed between major stakeholders is much smaller than it could be, and minimum time is spend maintaining current relationships. This is due to the amount of time staff members devote to coordinating the logistics of their respective events. The assistant director for employer relations and job development spends eight months organizing The Career Fair, and three of those are so consumed with coordinating logistics that no time is left to create or even maintain stakeholder relationships. Any interactions are limited to dealing with requests specific to the event, rather than learning about how WMU CSES can effectively engage with an employer or discovering new ways to engage students. The question to ask is, how many more relationships can we gain or strengthen by hiring someone to handle event logistics? The opinion of the author is doing so would provide staff members so many more opportunities to network and connect much more effectively.

The popularity of general information sessions on WMU's main campus have declined sharply, with only two or three students attending any of the sessions offered in the 2013-2014 academic year. However, attendance for information sessions and networking events at the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences Parkview Campus averaged 50-70 students.

Though no cause has been specifically attributed to this phenomenon, conjecture determined that it may be due to the time commitment a student would have to make for a session that may not yield information specific to their wants, needs, program or skills sets. This phenomenon may be specific to main campus due to the diversity of colleges and programs housed there. Given that employers want to maximize their return on investment and students want personalized attention in informal and less intimidating settings, a good solution may be incorporating recruiters and/or alumni into the Career Zone during drop-in hours. Other possible areas in which to incorporate recruiters and/or alumni would be in high-traffic areas to reach the general student population, such as in the Bernhard Center, at the flag circle (in good weather), or at the Miller fountains. To reach specific, targeted, student populations, they could be stationed in buildings where classes for the desired program or programs are held (Nespodzany, 2014). WMU CSES might also consider holding networking events or information sessions specific to a program or major in those buildings where the majority of those students are located.

Employer relations activity will end up being at the center of successful career services organizations. For the immediate future, the assistant director of employer relations and job development will be the person tasked with the execution of these activities. Recognizing this, she has created the concept of a compass with the student at the center and the stakeholders with whom she will create relationships as the cardinal directions. She will use this compass as a marketing tool for WMU CSES and the employer relations team but also as a visual way to explain the importance of employer relations (Nespodzany, 2014). The student will have access to faculty, alumni, career services, and recruiters to provide personalized services and help guide them toward their future career.

Since WMU CSES is focusing on creating stronger relationships with and providing more services for students in the College of Arts and Sciences, they should attend meetings with their faculty and staff to create and strengthen those relationships. The partnership between the assistant director for employer relations and job development and the Assistant Manager of Engagement for the Office of Development and Alumni Relations could result in a dramatic increase of alumni activity within employer relations. She should work with the career development staff to see where recruiter presence can be added or increased, whether it is in the Career Zone, in class presentations or during regularly-scheduled events. It will be up to the assistant director of employer relations and job development and the employer relations team to create working relationships between those stakeholders in order to provide the student with comprehensive, consistent and fruitful resources to help them successfully navigate their college experience and advance into a post-graduation career.

Conclusion

It is clear that there is a paradigm shift in career services, and, more specifically, employer relations. Instead of simply providing self-assessment resources, career advice, and document critiques, the new generation of career services professionals will act as more of a critical component in a web of networks between students, faculty and employers. As the Student Affairs Leadership Council (2012) concluded, employer relations activities will be at the center of these networks, since staff engaging in those activities have high involvement with employers and alumni. If these staff members are not currently involved with or aware of current student engagement practices, that involvement or knowledge will become essential to success.

Limitations

The primary limitation in this study was the loss of the recordings from interviews with Wayne, Julia and Julie. In the future, use two recording machines, so that there is always a back up. Immediately after recording an interview, save it to a back up source. Another suggestion would be to investigate how OU and CMU are able to provide advising to alumni, since they do not receive any funding or personnel support from their alumni services offices. Investigating how CMU gave away so many events would be interesting. Something that could add a wealth of information would be to interview more people from each office to explore how employer relations work in a practical fashion among the staff. A separate study could be conducted by interviewing every paid staff member in each of the three departments and compare the similarities and differences in operations among each team (such as employer relations, advising, etc). Additionally, the sample for this study was a convenience sample, so, to gain a greater understanding of the current practices within collegiate career services offices, one study a greater number of career services offices. Something else that may be interesting to study is how the type of university effects the career services offices and programming. For example, does the fact that so many CMU students take classes online have an effect on the work of CMU Career Services? The last major limitation was that I have five years worth of insider perspective at WMU CSES, which may have caused a biased critique of WMU CSES.

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Appendix A

Topics for unstructured interviews taken from page 10 of the 2009 NACE Professional Standards for College and University Career services Evaluation Workbook:

- Career services must assist students and other designated clients in exploring a full range of career and work possibilities that match their career goals.

- Career services must assist students and other designated clients in preparing job-search competencies and tools to present themselves effectively as candidates for employment.

- Career services must assist students and other clients in obtaining information on employment opportunities and prospective employers.

- Career services must assist students and other designated clients in connecting with employers through campus interviews, job listings, referrals, direct application, networking, publications, and information technology.

- Career services must assist students and other designated clients in making informed choices among a variety of options.

- Career services should develop and maintain relationships with employers, alumni, and other entities that provide career development and employment opportunities for students and other clients.

Other questions asked during all unstructured interviews:

- How long have you been with your department?

- How long have you been in your current role?

- What is the organizational structure of your department?

- Where is your department located within the organizational structure of the university?

- Who are your "other designated clients," if applicable?