

**The Career Guidance Unit of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura
- Building upon the 1998-2006 Experience and Moving Ahead**

The Mission

is to be a Service Centre of quality and excellence, while also being a role-model for the Sri Lankan university system, supporting the University in its objective of helping produce capable, employable and satisfied graduates and potential leaders empowered to contribute positively to their own well being, to the economy within the context of an ever-changing macro environment, and to the society as part of the conscience of a democratic civilised, and inclusive society.

The Aims and Objectives are:

1. To provide a service in Career Education, Career Guidance and Career Management
accessible to undergraduates and recent graduates of the University
offering them and/or guiding them to a variety of resources
including people, data & information, and activities & programmes
to support them in their efforts
to plan their future career and put those plans into effect
2. To support the students and the University in the area of Employability Skills Development
making a meaningful and relevant contribution to the University's learning environment
through programmes and activities offered independently by the Careers Service itself
and through collaborative work particularly with academic colleagues and academic
departments, being a privileged channel also for feedback from the world of work
intended to inform curriculum development
moving progressively into becoming a well-integrated service within university culture and
life responding to feedback from stakeholders and continually improving services
3. To help the graduating students in their job search and career projects as well as prospective employers through recruitment-related services
by maintaining and communicating information to graduating students on opportunities
available on the basis of a database of such persons registering for such service
by keeping major employers, Chambers and Federations and Professional Bodies informed
of developments at the university and of the type of graduate being introduced into the
market, and providing opportunities to such employers when so requested for them to
present themselves and the opportunities they offer to the students and
by acting as an intermediary in passing information as required in either direction, and if so
requested acting on behalf of prospective employers by searching for and short-listing
candidates who fit a specification provided
4. To be a partner involved in the broader preparation for life and work of the undergraduate
contributing to such together with the University, inter-university bodies and other partners
and with an emphasis on knowledge, skills, attitudes and values
helping the undergraduates to build up their capacity for independent and life long learning,
and continued self/professional development
so as to become capable, employable and satisfied graduates and potential leaders
empowered to contribute positively to their own well being, to the economy within the
context of an ever-changing macro environment, and to the society as part of the
conscience of a democratic civilised, and inclusive society.

Fit within national priorities for the sector

The stated objectives fit well within the currently accepted priorities for Careers work of the national university system which are:

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| 1. | Counselling and Advice on Careers | (ref. our objectives 1 & 4) |
| 2. | Employability Skills | (ref. our objective 2) |
| 3. | Information Services | (ref. our objective 1 & 3) |
| 4. | Networking | (ref. our objectives 2, 3 & 4) |
| 5. | Work Experience | (ref. our objective 2) |
| 6. | Graduate Placement | (ref. our objective 3) |
| 7. | Integration within Curricula. | (ref. our objectives 2 & 4) |
| 8. | Training, Research and Development | (ref. esp. our objectives 2 & 4) |

Service Delivery against stated objectives:

To provide a service in Career Education, Career Guidance and Career Management

- Currently operational mainly through relevant workshops open to undergraduates and graduating batches of students.
- As needed one-to-one support too is provided
- Services will be further expanded with the recruitment of two Careers Advisers (e.g. to cover study skills training for students in 1st and 2nd years of study)
- Reference material (in hard copy form) is available
- A computer-based employability skills lab currently being completed will make available a variety of reference and self-study material which will at the same time support the workshops being conducted or planned

To support the students and the University in the area of Employability Skills Development

- Currently operational mainly through relevant workshops
- This will be a core area for the future with a plan for a variety of workshops and training programmes to be conducted on a regular basis
- Have already collaborated with the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce in a pilot mentoring programme where senior executives helped groups of undergraduates. Leaving formal placement as an activity to be handled by the academic programmes within which such are integrated, the Careers Service will continue to initiate and support short programmes of exposure to industry including mentoring and work shadowing
- Activities & Services to be further expanded with the recruitment of Careers Advisers
- A computer-based employability skills lab currently being completed will make available a variety of resources for supporting workshops and for open-access use.
- So as to be able to better inform curriculum development, undertake in more systematic manner the study of graduate destinations, labour market trends, skills profiles in demand etc going beyond the limited studies done so far
- Have already contributed to a programme within the Faculty of Medical Sciences where Career Education was integrated into the curriculum and it is hoped to support other academic units in similar manner
- The informal links with the Faculties and academic departments developed so far will be formalized through the establishment of an Advisory Committee with volunteers/delegates from the different faculties to facilitate and support better integration of Career Guidance and skills development within curricula.

To help the graduating students in their job search and career projects as well as prospective employers through recruitment-related services

- This has been a regular activity since 6 years. While we do not wish to be an employment agency but one contributing to employability of graduates, we run the service and inform the recent graduates of opportunities as such information is received. Regular mailers are done, and urgent messages are handled via the telephone and e-mail
- At the moment an excellent reputation has been built up with us being recognized as a Centre that puts in a lot of effort (though offered free) into finding graduates who fit an employer's specification. It is noted that the number of employers who request such service is on the increase.

- The finalists register themselves and input their data into a computer database. This is currently local and is processed at the unit. We have drawn up the specification for a system that will offer an opportunity for employers to search it via the web and identify graduates that appear to match their criteria. The identification will be through a serial number and the prospective employer will then request the unit to be put in contact with the graduate concerned. We are hoping to recruit a programmer on contract basis to help complete this project.

To be a partner involved in the broader preparation for life and work of the undergraduate

- Our collaboration within the university system has won us respect and a leadership role
- The unit now maintains for example 10 notice boards of its own where information about activities, programmes etc are made known to the student community. Among other things, daily it even carries headlines from two news sources (The New York Times and Channel News Asia) to help build up interest among students about what happens in the world beyond our borders.
- While the subject area is being handled mainly through presentations and workshops, a pilot project done last year by collaborating with the University Student Union in a film festival involving 4 award-winning movies has shown that even involvement in that area through “Movies with a Message” supported by a socio-political commentary on such leads to value education. That such was a success was seen in the unit being invited to support such a festival by a Faculty Student Union and an event organized by an academic department.

Facilities, Resources and Critical Constraint

While Career Guidance was accepted as a priority area within the educational reforms effort undertaken and promoted in the mid-nineties, and while a lot of moral support for the project was available within the university system and very much within the university itself, it is noted with regret that activities and developments had to be pushed as if they were personal objectives.

Unlike when other new Faculties and Academic Departments were set up, only minimal facilities were made available to this service when it was initiated in 1998. In spite of repeated requests this experimental and start-up service for which there was no established pattern to emulate did not receive any seed money. We are happy to note that after a struggle spread over nearly 8 years we have managed now to achieve a good level of infrastructural facilities but the question nevertheless remains as to whether it was worth or necessary for the individual who accepted the responsibility to sacrifice, not to say waste, an incredible amount of time, effort and self for such.

A similar struggle is now being waged to obtain the services of two Careers Advisers (on permanent basis for involvement in the core activities) and a computer programmer (on contract basis for one year) to support the work of making operational the multimedia-based computer skills lab and a few other computing projects at the unit. The process initiated in November 2005 has still not reached its expected conclusion/result. There is without doubt tremendous moral support for the project but the system is either unable to or does not move towards reasonable solutions.

Points worthy of special note:

1. Our Careers Service does not simply copy the approach common in the developed world and accepts the fact that in the case of the typical client at our university only a limited set of options is available to most undergraduates in the choice of study programmes, and to most graduates with regard to avenues of employment. In order to cater to the needs of such who are disadvantaged and generally end up unemployed or under-employed, rather than “guidance” to be able to select what one may be suited for and/or what one really wants etc. we stress the element of “coping” with the given reality, and strive to empower them increasing their competitiveness through the development of employability skills.

2. Our Careers Service also accepts that a University situated in the heart of the metropolis with also an extended alumni network may depend much on external resource persons and corporate contributions. Our approach is rather to build our own resources and the staff, as well as the links with the academic departments, to be able to do the work internally in continued and sustained manner so that Career Guidance and Skills Development etc become integrated as a normal component of university life and culture. External support will then be sought as needed particularly in what really matters.
3. The type of access to the database of recent graduates already referred to earlier will be a unique and innovative feature that aims to provide information to the world outside while respecting the principle of privacy of information as contact details of an individual are released only after such person consents to such.
4. The multimedia-based skills development lab (referred to) will also be unique in that it will be totally reserved for the task. Thus students will not be able to run office applications or typical packages. Such will in fact not even be installed. Only careers-related and skills development applications will be accessible. These will include:
 - Career Guidance Resources (opportunities for work and further study related to subject areas)
 - Skills development and self-development material & tools
 - Other support material (e.g. entrepreneurship)
 - Learning Resources (subject-oriented, How to study, How to prepare for exams etc.)
 - Sample material on alternative methods of learning (e.g. Business Games)
 - Training Videos (“How To” search for jobs, prepare CVs & Applications, face interviews etc.)
 - Aptitude Tests / Personality Tests
 - Practice Tests (for IELTS, TOEFL, GMAT, GRE etc)
 - Electronic Newsletters on a variety of topics
 - Company Information
5. The Founder-Director of the Unit is already accepted and respected within the university system and outside as one leading the way and guiding others particularly as far as Career Guidance work in the Universities is concerned. As a result the unit itself is accepted as doing pioneering and innovative work. The unit even has a meaningful Logo and Motto that effectively summarises its mission and objectives. Provided the constraints with regard to the minimum human resource requirements can be overcome, the unit can be turned into an exemplar and role-model for the university system of Sri Lanka.

