

Graduates & Competence

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GRADUATES AND COMPETENCE: A PROPOSAL FOR TRACER STUDIES AT UNIVERSITAS KRISTEN INDONESIA

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Introduction

The national accreditation system for the higher education institutions in Indonesia, aimed at assessing performance of the existing study programs, announced their first evaluation in late 1997. The assessment was carried out under the authority of the National Accreditation Board of the Department of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia. The board started with undergraduate programs and the accredited study program may be reevaluated at the latest five years after the first evaluation takes place.

This newly introduced evaluation system has forced higher education institutions to assess their own performance on, among others, the input-process-output of the study program. It is also required to evaluate its graduates' performance in their places of work. The Universitas Kristen Indonesia or Christian University of Indonesia – as, perhaps, many other institutions – came across difficulties to trace the whereabouts of its graduates. Apparently higher education institutions do not consider the graduates' employment before or after the period of study as part of their service to the community. Little – or no -- attention has been given to the career development, let alone problems that the graduates face in searching for their first jobs.

Outside the higher education institutions, the demand of the industries or labor market for graduates that fit their work requirements is increasing. The employers of the graduates have no choice but to provide the graduates with the required additional skills and knowledge which they did not get during their studies. This condition, however, will force higher education institutions to reconsider their function as the knowledge provider, the institutions that dictate what the students should learn or gain when they study. If it is insufficient, the industries are free to equip them with the necessary skills. Kellermann and Sagmeister (2000) highlight the different competence which is provided by higher education and the requirement of the work place, "there is discrepancy between competence acquired in the education and those acquired in 'real life.'"

As a higher education institution which produces 800-900 graduates each year, Universitas Kristen Indonesia (or UKI) also faces difficulties in tracing its graduates' whereabouts and has not --so far-- done satisfactory evaluation on this. It is apparent that UKI neglects its duty, i.e. to follow up its graduates' career development. Like all other higher education institutions, UKI completes its duty with a ceremonious graduation with the 'Gaudeamus Igitur' hymn which symbolizes the cut off contact between the institution and the graduates.

Statement of the Problem

It is about time that the Universitas Kristen Indonesia assess its performance as far as the graduates are concerned. The growing awareness of the graduate performance in their work place will force the higher education institution to reconsider its functions as knowledge provider. Moreover, as far as its existence as a private higher education institution is concerned, UKI must consider the following:

- The number of private higher education institutions in Indonesia is growing and the government does not make any clear regulations on establishment of study programs and how many students may enroll (an exception is the faculty of medicine where the number of entrants is limited). This means that there is an excess number of graduates in certain study programs with similar qualifications.
- The best high school graduates go to state universities and the rest are divided among so many private universities with almost similar offers.
- UKI does not have clear direction toward departmental or institutional specialization that can give additional values to the institution and offer clear objectives for the study programs so that they meet the society's requirements.
- The allocation of state and local curriculum in the study programs (around 80% to 20%) has forced Universitas Kristen Indonesia to carefully develop its (local) curriculum in order to keep pace with the fast development of the outside world.
- The development of curriculum, to the best of my knowledge, is based on the departmental staffs' point of view in addition to the exact weight of state curriculum for the accreditation requirement.
- This institution does not provide the graduates with the additional knowledge or skills required by employers in their career development (key qualification of the students).
- And last, but not least, the issue of globalization and the free market will decide on the survival of the fittest.

Need Assessment on Graduates' performance

The current UKI assessment organized by the appointed task force finds that all study programs fail to locate the graduates' whereabouts, let alone their career development. Questions on, for example, (1) how long do graduates wait until they find their

first job? (2) how do you evaluate the graduates' performance at work? (3) how much are their first salaries, and (4) state what the employers comment (complaints and recognition) about the graduates' performance in their respective offices, are almost all left blank. Several study programs provide assumptions on these particular questions but they are not reliable since they receive information from only a few graduates who do make regular contact with their alma mater. The overall picture of the profile of the graduates and their performance in the work place was not provided since no tracer studies have been performed in this institution.

It is indeed about time for UKI and other higher education institutions to reconsider their function regarding the graduates' employment. The higher education institutions need to be proactive in their service to the community and see whether the graduates are adequately equipped with the following qualifications in order to survive in the job market (from Vincens and Chirache in Paul and Murdoch, 1992):

1. General knowledge and foreign languages knowledge, especially, business English.
2. Communication technology: computer technology, telephone, fax, and audiovisual technology.
3. Personal Skills: Autonomy, communication and listening skills, courage, team and company spirit, initiative and open-mindedness
4. Flexibility and ambition: able to change through time and location and also to have the ambition to become managers themselves.

Kellermann and Sagmeister (2000) further argue concerning consistency between competence set by higher education and consumers:

1. The education system might be so far removed from the workplace that indicators are unable to anticipate the

- competence graduates will need for productive life (under-qualification);
2. The workplace might not be organized in such a way that graduates' skills can be used efficiently (under-utilization);
 3. The graduates might be overqualified

The objectives are to, at least, develop a curriculum based on the job requirements. Although there is an issue on "impurification" of higher education when market demand is considered, it is our responsibility to see far beyond. As a private university which is funded by the society, UKI needs to give better service to the community, by for example, carrying out studies on its graduates in their work places.

UKI: Its Position and the Prospects of Its Graduates

In informal conversation with (the) graduates working in industries, input on certain competences required in their work place must be considered in the next curriculum development. Since connections between industries and the institution does not exist, such information should be considered more seriously. Apparently there is a vast gap between the curricula and competence provided by the higher education and the job requirement.

The European universities have been for the past ten years working on the tracer studies in order to see what the universities have contributed to the market—industries and the community. It was not easy since tracing graduates involves both parties, i.e. the institution and the graduates themselves. Although it has been the concern of many higher education institutions all over the world, still the methods of linking the graduates to their alma mater are considered ineffective.

The Universitas Kristen Indonesia was established in 1953, with two faculties, the Faculty of Pedagogy and Philosophy and the

Faculty of Economics. The mission of its founding fathers was to actively participate in the process of preparing skilled citizens in the higher education sector, as a contribution to the national development.

In the course of time, it has expanded its service and now has seven faculties, namely, Education, Letters, Economics, Law, Medicine, Engineering, and Social and Political Sciences with 15 study programs. The establishment of non-degree programs (three year period), in certain study programs and a graduate program in education management, is also a response to the needs of the society and the market.

It is also for the continuing service of private higher education to the community that the overall assessment on input-process-output at the Christian University of Indonesia has been carried out, i.e. to see the present position and, from there, decide on the future direction.

Concerning output assessment (on graduates' whereabouts), however, the following results are not surprising:

1. None of the study programs keeps track of their graduates and the existing data base on graduates is not reliable or updated;
2. Most of the study programs have alumni associations, however, no significant activities have been held to keep track of them and the only means to contact the alumni is through alumni gatherings or seminars -- usually attended by not even 10 % of the total graduates of each study program;
3. Apparently there are few connections between some study programs and industries--informally, but no memorandum of understanding has been established
4. The university apparently emphasizes producing graduates without taking into account the graduates' future jobs or career development.

The results also show that efforts to trace the graduates have been done but are limited to organizing seminars and the like. A seminar on graduates' prospective careers, for example, which was recently held for the Faculty of Engineering students, especially the freshmen, where alumni working in industry took part as the speakers, was one way of introducing the students to the real world of the work place from the very beginning of their involvement in higher education activities. Teichler (1998) also highlights this because "most (people-- high school graduates, most probably) preferred to choose a field of study on the basis of interest rather than career prospects. They have no vision on what they will do after they finish their studies. Actually, it is, to the best of my knowledge, part of university's responsibility." The activities, whether included in the curriculum or not will open up their horizon of their prospective job and career planning while pursuing their degrees.

Proposal to Tracer Studies at UKI and Action Plan

Until May 2001, UKI has produced 19,478 graduates for the society but no single tracer studies on its graduates has ever taken place. Helping the students plan their career is as important as the need to follow their career development after their graduation. Tracer studies, research aiming at tracing the graduates' career development, is a necessity in the development of UKI as a private higher education institution in Indonesia.

It is clear that UKI does not have adequate information about its graduates for the over 40 years since the first graduation in 1958, and tracing them will need a lot of effort and probably will not lead to a successful profile of the graduates. The assessment result, showing that they cannot trace their graduates and that alumni gatherings only cover not even 10 percent of their graduates, indicates the necessity to keep a good relationship with the students and continuously inform them of

the importance of updating their personal record since their first contact with the university.

The following overview of facts and findings about Higher Education in European countries (Teichler 1996) can serve as a guideline for carrying out tracer studies at UKI:

1. "Do the competences of the graduates meet the job requirements and thus, the demands of the employment system? What are the consequences of eventual discrepancies—in quantitative terms—between demand and supply, and—in qualitative terms—between competences and requirements
2. What role does the attainment of university degree play in overall process of social selection and status distribution? What mode of educational meritocracy is emerging, and what does it mean for the links between competences and work tasks, for teaching and learning at universities?
3. How do the university students change in terms of their competencies, their motivations and inclinations as well as career expectations and prospect? How does this affect the characters and quality of teaching and learning at universities and eventually the competences of graduates?
4. How do the universities evolve as regards students' access, enrolment and graduation, the institutional patterns, the study programmes as well as the teaching and study activities in the wake of their changing role for graduate employment and work and how do they try to change these conditions actively" (pp. 8-9).

There are some particular aspects that we can gain from tracer studies, aside from the feedback and input on the teaching and learning process and improvements or adjustments needed. Integration with the surroundings and difficulties in adjusting

with the environment, for example, is what a similar study by Amini (2000) shows. The study involving respondents of Southeast Asian countries pursuing their further studies in three universities in Germany indicates "that German language seems to be the most important problem of the respondents during their education in Germany and about the learning experience, it is found that the opportunity to work with students in German universities are limited and that 10% mention the little time of the advisors for an efficient supervision" (p. 24).

This means that tracer studies are not only carried out for market purposes alone. This will help study programs or the university to decide what qualifications the students should possess, obstacles concerning their studies, learning attitude, and many others. The findings will definitely facilitate higher education institutions to reconsider their service to the society and the students as service users.

Therefore this paper will propose a plan on how to trace the graduates in order to follow their career planning and development in a more organized way by employing two different approaches:

1. Data collection (data base) with pre-research activity on job perspectives (year 1 – 4) and continued with annual data base on freshmen.
2. First tracer study (Year 7 with 800 graduates of the Year 1) and the second tracer study (year 10 with 2400 respondents of year 1 – 4)

The above mentioned approaches will be divided into the following schemes:

1. In the students' registration in the School Year 2001, a data bank of the students' personal information (such as name, complete address (including mailing address and parents'),

faculty, etc) will be prepared and updated at the beginning of every school year.

2. Following the registration, students will also be asked to fill in questionnaires on their job perspective aiming at portraying their points of view and attitudes towards job and career planning and what they expect from their studies in preparing themselves to be ready for the labor market.
3. At graduation, they are asked to fill in questionnaires on their perspective on jobs followed by research on their changing attitudes towards jobs.
4. The first tracer study will take place on the seventh year of their career development and expectation.
5. The second tracer study, taking place in the 10th. year, will be performed in order to see their career establishment and prospects.

The Establishment of Alumni Organization

Organizing an alumni data base and contact have to be done professionally. Leaving the task to the registration desk is not a wise decision. The attempts, such as a temporary task force on graduate tracing or irregular alumni gatherings or homecomings by study programs of faculties, do not seem to have worked well or to have given significant impact to the future development and existence of this institution. The fact that graduates come only for legalizing documents or to obtain some official letters concerning their studies gives a clue that communication between this institution and its graduates does not exist.

The establishment of an alumni office seems inevitable. This organization will be responsible for keeping data bases of the students and establishing good communication with the students and the alumni.

The alumni office will work on ³ short-term and long-term strategies:

Short term plan: students and graduates will have an easy and direct access to the graduate office that only deals with graduates and their career prospects and development.

Long term plan: this office will not only serve through data collection but also graduate networking where graduates will find easy access to contact their friends, for job opportunities or different careers, and inform the institutions of certain criteria requested by the market.

The organization will be responsible for the following tasks:

- Registering students and updating their data
- Conducting pre-research on job prospectives at registration and during the third year
- Informing students of the activities of the alumni office
- Establishing an easy and direct access for the students and contacted alumni
- Establishing contact with industries
- Organizing regular meetings between alumni and students in their respective departments concerning job perspectives
- Organizing seminars on career prospects and development
- Tracer study, with collaboration with the Research Center (every five years)

Because the organization will serve as an information agency for all students and alumni, this will run under the office of the vice rector for communication and relations.

Conclusion

In this fast changing era, it is a necessity for the university—the so called sole provider of higher education-- to consider their role in the society. They require graduates with competencies that will fit the market and the society, meaning the competence

acquired in the university and those required are met. This significant demand calls for immediate response as the existence of higher education service to the society is at stake. Research on graduates' performance in the work place and their search for jobs after graduation will help the higher education institution in its self assessment, thus maintaining its service to the community.

As it is not easy to trace the graduates (especially for old universities), it is advisable that the institution upgrades the data bases of the enrolling students and intensively informs the students of the importance of contacting the alma mater concerning their career development. Needs assessment, however, have to take place prior to the first study in order to decide the objectives.

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