IDENTIFYING THE SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADUATES´ PREFERENCES FOR SELECTING THE UNIVERSITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF SELECTED MARKETING TOOLS

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Abstract

In several countries of Central Europe we have observed a demographic decrease of the number of the secondary school graduates applying for a university study. The traditional working positions without the necessity of a university education required by the labour market have almost ceased to exist and majority of the students want to continue at a university. The Slovak Republic as a Central European country with 5.5 million inhabitants has several specifics in this area. There are 20 public universities, then 3 state and eleven private ones. Almost 30 % of the secondary school graduates continue their study at a university abroad and during recent years the Slovak universities have started competing with each in addressing the applicants. The result is the utilisation of different marketing tools by the university institutions through which the secondary school students are addressed. There are Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and many others. It is a complicated process to measure their impacts, however, there are certain methods that are effective and are able to address the current generation of the secondary school students better than other ones. The Faculty of Security Engineering at the University of Žilina had to start a new marketing strategy and the individual tools and their effectiveness are regularly assessed. This article comprises the results of the investigations and detections of the measurable indicators aimed at assessing the faculty and its study programmes from the point of view of the applicants for the reason of identifying the most effective tools for the marketing communication.

Keywords: secondary school, university, marketing tools, students, indicators.

1 INTRODUCTION

The current security situation shows that the society inevitably needs to cope with the current threats more effectively. We need security experts with university education who know the methods of solving the crisis phenomena, are able to identify, to analyse and assess the risks in various environments, to manage preventive activities and adequate reactions to the crisis phenomena and to eliminate their negative consequences on people, material values and environment.

The university study in the area of security in Central Europe is provided by several state, public and private institutions that, however, in majority of cases orient on one or two partial security areas, e.g. police academies, military academies, universities aimed at fire protection, protection of people and property, etc. The Faculty of Security Engineering of the University of Žilina in Žilina (FSE UNIZA) offers study programmes on both the horizontal and vertical levels of security with the basic aim to protect life, property and environment.

The shortage of security experts is in practice confronted with the negative demographic development and decreasing interest of the secondary school graduates in the university study programmes with technical orientation. Mathematics and technical subjects represent the biggest problem for the university study applicants during the entrance exams and after beginning the university study. However, the high-quality university education of the security experts is determined by coping with the technical subjects. The FSE UNIZA, based on the negative trend in the area of the study successffulness of the technical subjects, worked out and implemented process and system changes for making the technically oriented university study programmes in the security area more attractive and introduced innovation tools and modern electronic and printed study materials to support a simple adaptation of the secondary school graduates to the university study of technical subjects.

The importance of educating in the security area proved by the studies of the security situation in the world and Europe cannot be overlooked. It is desirable for the society to increase the interest of the secondary school students in studying the university programmes aimed at security and to create for them conditions for supporting the study of technical subjects.
2 METHODOLOGY

Currently, in Slovakia, a lot of universities are fighting with a low interest of secondary school students in university study. As it has been mentioned, a lot of students go to study to the Czech Republic (30 %) or other EU countries. The universities have started to utilise various marketing tools to attract them to study and several marketing and promotional companies understood this need and offer various services/products that are to serve just for this purpose. However, hand in hand with the marketing tools also systemic changes directly in the organization have to be implemented for the students not only to come to study to the university. After admission, they should also like their study. Today, the recommendation of friends from universities to students who are studying at the secondary schools and their families is an important tool for giving information about the university.

FSE UNIZA has implemented several measures that can be divided into two groups as follows:

- the system and infrastructural measures,
- the marketing and promotional measures.

2.1 System and Infrastructural Measures

FSE UNIZA invested in the faculty premises, renewed the classrooms and purchased modern computer technology. All changes were published on the faculty website. These activities amounting to ten thousands of EUR were paid by the EU funds.

A course of mathematics that makes problems to students in the first year and is the cause of leaving the study due to failing this exam started. 60 % of the first year students registered in this course. This brought a higher quality to the teaching process and this initiative was appreciated also by the beginning teachers who acquired the necessary skills and abilities. The faculty takes care of the teachers’ language education too. They can attend the English lessons during their working hours.

We extended the possibilities of organizing excursions to the companies that are oriented on the operation security; the students were most attracted by the nuclear equipment and factories with industrial production.

2.2 Particular Measures – Examples

Here we introduce examples of selected measures that have been implemented to practice.

Implementing system measures to support the students and removing their failures during study – increasing the knowledge level from chosen technical subjects:

Training of Mathematics and the subject Mathematic Seminars for completing and deepening the secondary school knowledge as a suitable entrance to the university study. The main emphasis is laid on those parts of mathematics which are taught at secondary schools in a smaller extent or not at all, however, they are inevitable for teaching at the university. (Figure 1).

![Mathematics – Successfulness Rate](image)

*Figure 1 Mathematics – the successfulness rate at FSE UNIZA before taking measures and after realizing them*
Supporting a better adaptation of the student during the transfer from the secondary school to the university environment

The option subject *Propaedeutics to University Study* involved in the 1st study year informs students about the processes and conditions of the university study, they get acquainted with the university environment and various educational and free-time activities.

![Figure 2 The successfullness rate at FSE UNIZA after 1st year of study before and after implementing the measures](image)

The support to find a better employment of the graduates, increasing competences and skills of the students, reaction to the requirements of practice:

In the area of selected profile subjects we introduced practical exercises and project lectures. Experts from practice are involved in the study. During the study the students have a possibility to participate in courses for preparing and acquiring several certificates that will increase the opportunity to find employment. The experts from practice are the diploma work readers who are also members of the state exam commissions. Since 2016 the faculty has been organising the *Days of Working Opportunities* whose main goal is the offer of employment, professional stays and study stays for the students and faculty graduates (Figure 3).

![Figure 3 Assessing the linkage of education and practice at FSE UNIZA before and after taking measures (students’ research)](image)
Making a Promotional Video and Its Dissemination

The faculty got a professional promotional video made by a private company and subsequently it had it disseminated among the secondary school students through the social network Facebook. The results – see the figure 4.

Figure 4 Assessing the promotional FSE UNIZA video

We can also mention the following implemented tools:

- The interactive Open Door Day at the FSE UNIZA with presentations of rescuers’ intervention and possibilities of study (Figure 5 and 6)
- Company Days where the companies offer particular working opportunities for the students
- Erasmus + stay of the secondary school students from the Czech Republic at FSE UNIZA (2 weeks)
- Student competitions of creating promotional materials, etc.

Figures 5 and 6 Open Door Day at the Faculty of Security Engineering

3 RESULTS

The entrance examination to the first study year in 2016 confirmed the expected growth of applications for the study due to the successful marketing conception that was verified during organising the Open Door Day. By 37.7 % more applicants sent their applications for the BA study programmes compared with the previous year. In 2017 we had an increase by 36.46 % compared with 2015 (Figure 7). Compared with the previous year also the structure of the admitted students significantly changed. While in 2015 the admitted applicants from secondary technical school created up to 61 % and the
student from the secondary grammar schools only 19%, in 2016 the number of the secondary technical school students dropped to 21.4%. In 2016 the secondary grammar school graduates created up to 41.5% of the admitted students and in 2017 it was even 48% (Figure 8).

![Number of applications for study](image1)

*Figure 7 Number of applications to FSE UNIZA before and after implementing the measures*

![Applicants according to the school category](image2)

*Figure 8 Applicants according to the school category before and after implementing the measures*

### 4 CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays the acquiring of the students for universities is a more and more complicated problem due to the decreasing trend caused also by the number of universities and decreasing demographic curve. The majority of the universities has realised the need of implementing the system changes and investments to marketing and promotional tools.

FSE UNIZA also created a new Marketing Strategy where the leading employees tried to implement as many innovative elements as possible and in this way to increase the attractiveness of the study in the security area that is very important today.

The implemented tools showed the correctness of majority of decisions that were designed and implemented into practice especially in connection with utilising the social networks and also extensive investments to updating the infrastructure and education. Those activities that allow the secondary
school students or students of the faculty create possibilities to study or possibilities to find employment after graduating from FSE.

However, it is important to innovate and adapt the marketing strategy according to the changing situation and to utilise such tools that will address the students that every university would like to gain. Therefore the faculty top management decided to prepare materials for a new study programme Industrial Safety which could attract mew students for the BA study.

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REFERENCES

