e-Portfolio Way: Career Advising at Ritsumeikan University

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Abstract: This paper discusses the effectiveness of employing an e-Portfolio system for career advising at the university level, making reference to the case in the Department of Electrical & Electronic Engineering at Ritsumeikan University in Japan. The e-Portfolio was mainly used for archiving information about students' attributes collected through online surveys and the students' reflections from learning through their academic as well as extra-curricular activities. The e-Portfolio further tracked the students' motivation and affecting factors to it. In addition, in order to foster the growth of the students, the academic advising was enriched with the concepts of self-actualization to develop autonomy, reflection to look back and plan for the next step, and proactive attitude to take part in the academic and the extra-curricular activities. It is reported that the new strategies to nurture the career-awareness in the academic life worked effectively.

Keywords: e-Portfolio, Career Advising, Awareness to Career, Student-centered Learning, Independent Learner, Higher Education

Introduction

The Ritsumeikan University is a private university in the Kansai or western area in Japan, established in 1900 with the mission of promoting a peaceful and democratic society. Ritsumeikan University is a private institution with the student population of approximately 36,000, spreading in 13 undergraduate departments, two research institutes, and 16 graduate level programs.

This paper focuses on the reform of education in terms of e-Portfolio in Department of Electrical & Electronic Engineering, the College of Science and Engineering. The reasons for educational reform are: (i) there were concerns about the students' ability to acquire basic academic skills before they proceed to the specialized fields of study. (ii) the need for identifying at risk students. (iii) the department sought ways to promote "student-centered learning" by nurturing students' motivation to learn. In other words, the department wanted to create an academic structure and advisory system that supported student independence, instilled responsibility for their own learning, and promoted strategic thinking about their coursework and post-graduate career.

1. Advising Program and the Use of Career Charts

The Department of Electrical & Electronic Engineering has traditionally institutionalized advisory support from faculty for lower classmen. One professor was assigned to ten undergraduate students for the discussion of various topics ranging from academic to non-academic issues depending on the students' needs. The faculty used a system called "Career Charts" in order to augment the advisory program.

Career Charts included a list of questions prepared by the career center to keep track of their students' academic progress and achievements, as well as any personal life issues that students wanted to share. Career Charts in the form of the paper-based blank form were distributed to students at the beginning of every academic year in order to for the students to be ready for the advisory meeting.

While Career Charts were a useful way to collect information from the advisee students, they also had numerous limitations. First, they did not allow advisors or students to review and reflect on their past work and track record. The actual questionnaire—despite including a large number of questions—needed to be revamped to collect meaningful data about the students' college experiences. Further, Career Charts did not allow advisors to provide customized feedback to each student in a timely fashion, since the survey was only conducted annually. As a result, the usage rate of Career Charts became low and their impact on the quality of advising turned out to be not working as initially intended.

2 Implementation of "Career Karte"

In order to solve these problems, faculty advisors at the Department of Electrical & Electronic Engineering decided to benchmark "Career Karte", an online portfolio which enables students to store, in one common centralized space online, reports and surveys conducted by advisors, to easily access to them for reviewing their academic progress and reflecting on their campus life.

2.1 Objective

The faculty's goal was to promote autonomous, balanced learning skills. The purpose of Career Karte was designed to encourage students to develop the following skills. It should be noted that the term "Karte" is a borrowed word from the German language. The word means "a card, a map, or a ticket". In Japan, the word "Karte" is often used in the medical field to keep patients' records of health conditions and treatments.

- The students will objectively evaluate their performance by reviewing accumulated information on their college career,
- The students will self-identify any issues or red flags,
- The students will learn how to solve problems proactively.

Career Karte was designed to promote students' autonomous attitude toward their own life by their own review and reflection processes. In this way, they developed the feeling of ownership of their own academic work as well as extra-curricular activities. Eventually, they began to make their own career plans for life.

The surveys to initiate such action are explained. The advisors conducted periodic surveys using the survey function embedded in the e-Portfolio system in order to track student experiences. Responses were sent back directly to the advisors and were automatically stored in students' portfolios chronologically. The findings from such surveys provided rich, individualized information of the advisee students to the advisors. For example, survey topics included the following:

1. Motivation to study/participate in club activities and take on part-time jobs (monthly)
2. Objectives in college life (beginning of first year)
3. Academic objectives (beginning of semester)
4. Levels of preparation for exams (every semester)
5. Thoughts after taking exams (every semester)
6. Thoughts after receiving grades (every semester)

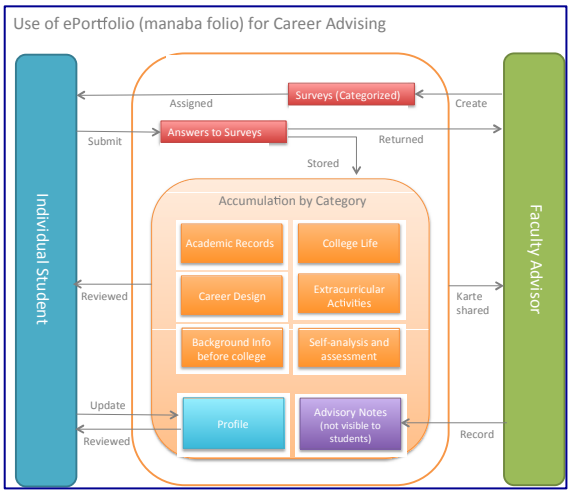

Fig.1. Use of ePortfolio (manaba folio) for Career Advising

The key factors that contributed to the success of The Career Karte at Ritsumeikan University are listed below.

1. The adopted e-Portfolio system offered rich functions to meet the needs of the advisors for customizing and preparing for online surveys to probe students' worries and anxieties, the results of which were automatically stored on student's portfolio
2. Both open-ended and concrete questions made the students answer easily and succinctly.
3. The timely surveys along the curriculum for the academic classes or seminars achieved higher response rates.
4. Friendly interface design of the e-Portfolio: Chronological accumulation and presentation of information and data
5. e-Portfolio offered a team of advisors to share and comment on their advising logs and notes.

The faculty advisors found Career Karte highly effective. The use of Career Karte and online surveys enabled the analysis of students' motivational factors that influenced student academic morale. It became vital resource for students to reflect on their university life, as well as for advisors to identify specific issues that the students encountered. It is important to point out that the Career Karte encouraged advisors to proactively reach out students who needed extra help. Furthermore, the accumulated information on students' academic and campus life and the advisory notes offered the faculty opportunities to discuss a wide range of issues at the meta-level. As the result, the advisors became able to track how students' motivation levels shifted over time and to pinpoint the factors that affected any changes.

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References

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