

UNIVERSITIES' SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY VS. GRADUATES' HUMAN CAPITAL*

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ABSTRACT The subject matter of the present paper pertains to human capital of university graduates in the context of universities' social responsibility. The paper makes a premise that the responsibility revolves around proper preparation of graduates for undertaking prospective professional and social roles.

The objective of the paper is to present selected aspects of human capital of university graduates emerging from actions undertaken by a socially responsible university. The paper makes a reference to survey studies aimed at evaluating knowledge, skills, social attitudes, and employment conditions of graduates of selected universities in Lublin.

Results of analyses indicate that modern universities ought to embrace a greater responsibility for parties participating in higher education process, including care for their qualifications, professional competences, and those encompassing substantive scope and personality. By doing so, they will contribute to challenges in the context of social responsibility being coped with, which, in turn, will foster the development of human capital.

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Introduction

Global processes occurring in and around universities influence the way they have been operating so far. Apart from teaching and research, cooperation with the public and businesses has become an additional task of a modern university (Shattock, 2005; Sam, Van Der Sijde, 2014; Rider, 2013).

Growing significance of universities in shaping knowledge of the society resulted in the emergence of issues regarding the scope of universities' social responsibility (López, Benítez, Sánchez, 2015). The social responsibility may be associated with universities' responsibility for general well-being (regarding the society, economy, etc.), one connected with adopting an attitude of respect towards the world, or responsibility for realizing particular tasks and their consequences (Kowalska, 2009).

The present paper diagnoses issues associated with the responsibility towards stakeholders (students and graduates) for the realization of particular tasks by universities. Human capital was evaluated with regards to knowledge, skills and social attitudes of students graduating from universities. The paper makes a premise that the quality of graduates' human capital stems from knowledge, skills and attitudes emerging in the process of education. Results of studies conducted among students of selected universities in Lublin region served as the basis for evaluating universities' efficiency in the process.

Universities' social responsibility — theoretical approach

The idea of corporate social responsibility (CSR) denotes voluntary incorporation of social and environmental issues into the commercial operation of businesses and their relationships with stakeholders (Sulejewicz, 2008; Piasecka, 2015). CSR is about transparency and ethical business operations which contribute to sustainable development, and take into account shareholders' expectations (Cybal-Michalska, 2014).

Universities have become a part of discourse as far as CSR is concerned (Maliszewski, Kacprzak, 2009; Piasecka, 2015). As public utility institutions, apart from teaching and research, universities are obliged to include social and ecological needs in their operation. As a consequence, they create added value for societies and economy (Mainardes, Alves, Raposo, 2010; Białoń, Werner, 2012).

Universities' responsibility may be expressed in creating value for societies in the form of educated graduates, impacting public opinion by expressing opinions of experts in sciences, by caring for their image and maintaining good relations with businesses and social environment (Cybal-Michalska, 2014). Responsible teaching is realized by the transfer of knowledge which discusses several fields, e.g. ethical operation, responsibility for the regions and its sustainable growth, and natural environment (Maliszewski, Kacprzak, 2009). Universities' responsibility is also associated with preparing graduates to perform particular social roles (Cybal-Michalska, 2014). Responsibility for education is manifested in inspiring students to gain knowledge and skills, but also to shape their attitudes, characters, personalities enabling them to become employed and create jobs as entrepreneurs (Białoń, Werner, 2012).

Operations of socially responsible universities encompass, e.g. the following (de Tchorzewski, 2006):

- aspirations for achieving the highest standards of teaching and research,
- teachers and students' ethical responsibility for respecting obligations of roles performed in the academic community,
- developing a friendly community facilitating learning and education,
- partner relations when cooperating with business and social environment.

The issue of university graduates' human capital

Human capital, understood as knowledge, skills, health, and vital energy (Rutkowska, 2012) determines peoples' capacity for work, adaptation to changes in their surrounding environment, and ability to create new solutions.

Human capital has become of particular significance since the Lisbon Strategy has been signed. The strategy assumes that the development of knowledge-based society and economy requires particular qualifications and competences which emerge primarily at universities (Biała księga, 2003; Władyniak, 2003).

When viewed from the graduate's perspective, their professional potential, measured by the capacity for achieving income and job satisfaction by means of applying knowledge and skills, constitutes the value of the potential. Such capital emerges from previous investments in education, gaining new experiences and qualifications.

Method

Based on the definition of human capital and its structure, universities' social responsibility was examined in two areas. The first pertained to the extent to which universities meet students' requirements regarding vocational training. The analysis encompassed 327 students graduating from Maria Curie Skłodowska University's (abbr. UMCS), and the University of Physical Education in Warsaw Biała Podlaska branch's (abbr. AWF) full-time second cycle programs.

The second aspect of universities' social responsibility discussed in the paper examines students' human capital with regards to health. Declarations of 357 students of health sciences of Medical University of Lublin (abbr. UM) and the University of Physical Education in Warsaw Biała Podlaska branch regarding their lifestyles were assessed.

The paper makes a premise that universities are responsible for the quality of students' human capital. A comparative analysis of students' opinions was conducted by non-parametric Pearson's chi-squared test and Cramér's V (Vc). Differences of $p < 0.05$ were considered statistically significant.

Empirical data constitutes a section of a broader study conducted by authors in the framework of DS. 205 statutory research.

Key competences as an element of students' human capital

In light of CSR, teaching which meets graduates' expectations constitutes a manifestation of universities' responsibility (Piasecka, 2015). Results of empirical studies conducted among students of selected universities in Lublin region illustrate such operations of universities.

Analyses determined the discrepancy between the desired and acquired key competences of students of examined universities.

Results of analyses indicate a series of discrepancies between students' expectations and acquired competences (Figure 1). Such competence gaps pertain primarily to the practical application of knowledge, creativity, and personal competences of respondents. Importantly, such competences translate into the value of human capital and enable a particular position on labor market to be achieved, or the standard of living improved.

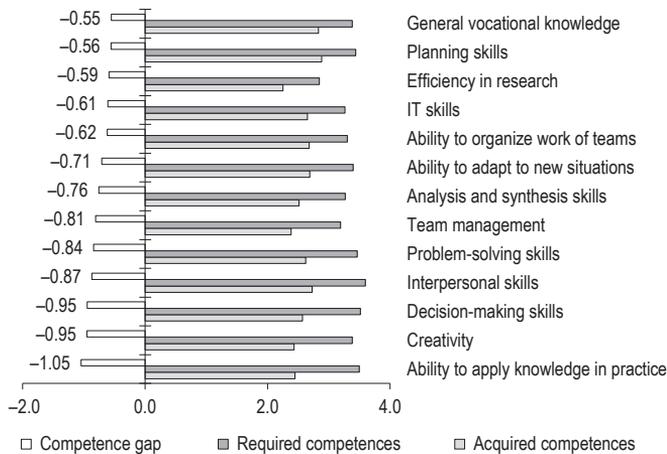


Figure 1. Required and acquired competences as evaluated by students (N = 327): scale 1–4; 4 – max

Source: own study.

Activities boosting graduates' human capital

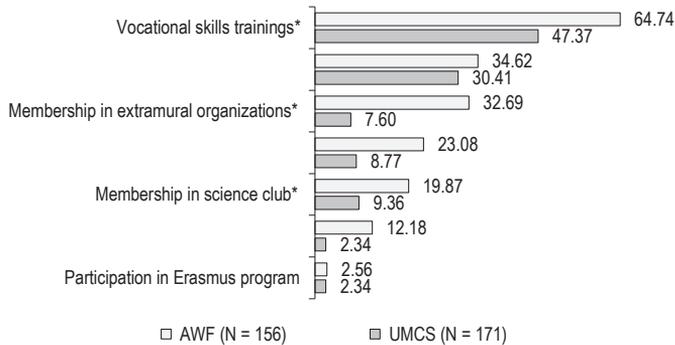
Human capital results from both an individual's participation in education, and actions encompassing qualifications' improvement. Actions of individuals undertaken with the purpose of acquiring additional professional experience seem significant in the process of developing students' capital. Such actions, undertaken in the course of studies, facilitate employability. In addition, if continued beyond university studies, they constitute success factors (Cybal-Michalska, 2014).

The paper attempts to evaluate the frequency students undertook actions fostering the development of human capital. In an attempt at establishing the extent universities impact such behavior, a comparative analysis regarding opinions of students of both evaluated universities was conducted.

Respondents' declarations regarding actions improving the value of human capital indicated that majority of these pertain to participation in various courses and trainings on hard competences (56% of respondents, Figure 2). AWF students manifested statistically significant activity (65% vs. 47% – UMCS students; $V_c = 0.17$) more frequently. Approx. every third student declared participation in trainings on soft skills. In addition, AWF students declared membership in extramural organizations (33% vs. 8%; $V_c = 0.32$), Academic Sports Association (23% vs. 9%; $V_c = 0.20$), and science clubs (20% vs. 9%; $V_c = 0.15$) more frequently.

Additional professional experience was gained primarily in summer work in Poland (approx. 45% of all respondents) or abroad (19%, Figure 3). AWF students declared working abroad more frequently (24% vs. 14% – UMCS; $V_c = 0.12$). Moreover, on average, every fifth student worked as a volunteer. Such form of involvement was observed among AWF students more frequently (26% vs. 15% – UMCS; $V_c = 0.14$).

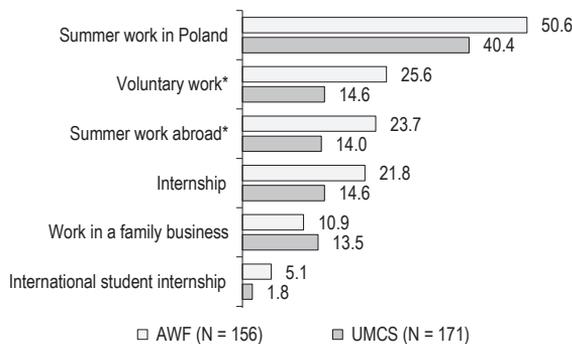
International student internships gained relatively low interest among students of both universities.



* Statistically significant differences; $p < 0.05$.

Figure 2. Activities boosting respondents' vocational capital (%)

Source: own study.



* Statistically significant differences; $p < 0.05$.

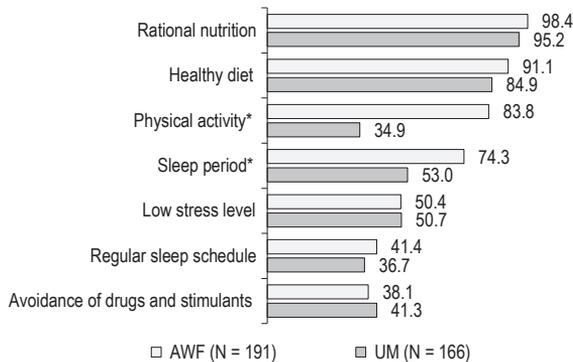
Figure 3. Experiences boosting respondents' vocational capital (%)

Source: own study.

Universities' social responsibility vs. students' pro-health attitude

Shaping students' attitudes constitutes a further aspect discussed in light of universities' social responsibility. Making a premise that health constitutes an element of human capital, declarations of UM and AWF students regarding health were examined.

General declarations of respondents regarding a healthy lifestyle were assessed in order to evaluate the quality of human capital. 58% of all respondents declared they lived a healthy lifestyle. AWF students declared it more frequently (72,8% vs. 41.6% – UM; $V_c = 0.32$).



* Statistically significant differences; $p < 0.05$.

Figure 4. Pro-health attitudes vs. the university (%)

Source: own study.

A premise was made that the identification of students' lifestyles and their diversity in examined universities may indicate how successful these institutions are regarding responsibility for education in terms of attitudes towards health.

The analysis attempted to identify students' pro-health attitudes and was conducted based on factors commonly considered as determining a healthy lifestyle (Anand, 2005; Słopiecka, 2012; Lipka, Janiszewski, Musiałek, Dłużniewski, 2015). The analysis revealed that diet and nutrition constitute a significant health factor among students of both examined universities. Respondents are diversified only regarding two aspects. Due to the specific focus of the university, AWF students undertook various forms of physical activity (approx. 84% vs. 35% – UM; $V_c = 0.50$) and slept a recommended number of hours (74% vs. 53% – UM; $V_c = 0.20$) more frequently than UM students.

Conclusions

The paper examines universities' social responsibility for developing human capital and preparing graduates for performing particular professional and social functions (Kowalska, 2009). Universities' social responsibility was evaluated from the perspective of graduates of second cycle programs at selected Lublin universities.

The evaluation of universities' effectiveness regarding social responsibility for knowledge and skills of graduates revealed discrepancies between students' expectations and acquired competences. These competence gaps pertained primarily to the practical application of knowledge, creativity, and respondents' personal competences. Such competences decide upon the value of graduates' professional human capital and enable them to achieve a specific position on labor market. Therefore, particular remedial actions in universities' policies ought to be undertaken.

Knowledge and skills of applying it in practice constitute a fundamental element of human capital. However, due to the inflation of university diplomas, graduates' competitiveness is determined by other factors as well (Barwińska-Małajowicz, 2015). Activities undertaken in order to acquire required competences and professional

experience constitute a significant factor in developing university graduates' human capital (Cybal-Michalska, 2014). Results of present studies indicate that students are aware of consequences of such actions. In addition, it was determined that it was AWF students who declared participation in activities facilitating the growth of human capital more frequently.

University graduates' human capital, measured by the capacity for achieving income and job satisfaction, is manifested not only by knowledge and skills, but also by their attitudes. Opinions of students representing health sciences were examined in light of universities' social responsibility. A premise was made that it is health which enables remaining elements of human capital (e.g. competences) to be fully utilized. Therefore, the study analyzed students' opinions regarding their lifestyles. Results revealed that only 58% of respondents declared living a healthy lifestyle. The results indicate a high level of human capital seen from the perspective of a lifestyle. On the other hand, universities offering education in such fields are responsible for knowledge, skills and social competences of future workforce in the field, who are to be ready to undertake professional activities (Varela-Mato, Cancela, Ayan, Martín, Molina, 2012). Studies revealed that attitudes towards health are determined by the specific character of the academic community a student functions in, among others.

Based on the presented results of empirical studies, universities ought to improve responsibility for the following:

- development of key competences to meet students' expectations,
- motivation of students and development of conditions enabling them to acquire additional experiences improving their human capital,
- shaping socially responsible attitudes (including those promoting healthy lifestyles).

When discussing universities' responsibility for graduates' human capital, the fact that students are co-responsible ought to be highlighted. According to the student-centric concept, the student bears chief responsibility. The role of the teacher is to direct and supervise learning. Therefore, modern higher education requires comprehensive involvement and cooperation of all stakeholders maintaining responsibility, obligation and goodwill (Mainardes, Alves, Raposo, 2010; de Tchorzewski, 2006).

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