Career Support in Universities

Mitsuko Uenishi
Hosei University

As increasing proportion of students continuing their education to university level, the mere fact of being a graduate no longer provides a significant advantage within the youth labor market. In addition, with job search activities becoming more individualized, complex, starting earlier and taking longer to complete, universities are increasingly required to provide career support. This was initially considered to be supporting students through job search activities, but more recently demands have been increasing for curricular and extra-curricular educational activities to provide integrated career support for students. As part of this, the contents of curriculum have also been called into question, with the relevance of current university education to work being particularly under scrutiny.

I. Background to the Calling into Question of Current University Career Support[1]

Currently, what kind of career education and support should be offered to students is being questioned at Japanese universities. In order to understand why university career support is being called into question at this time, it is necessary to look at two significant background changes that have taken place in post-graduation employment. These are firstly, the increasing proportion of students who continue their education to university level and the decreasing ratio of graduate employment, and secondly, the changes that have taken place in the process of university graduate recruitment in corporations. These changes have led to calls for improvements in the way that universities provide career support.
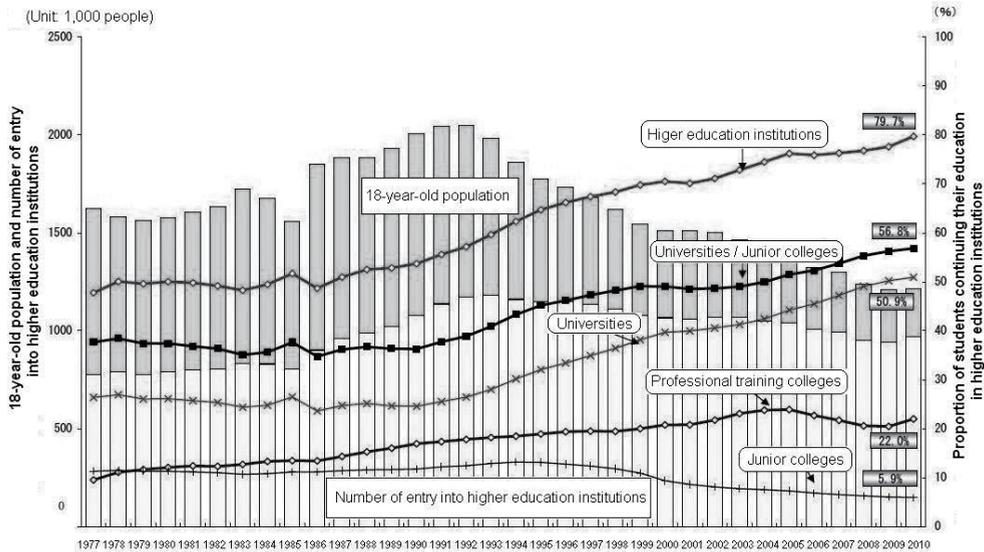
1. Increasing University Entry and Decreasing Graduate Employment Rates
(1) Increasing University Entry

As shown in Figure 1, the proportion of students continuing education to university level[2] was steady between the late 1970s and around 1990 at 24% to 27%. This subse-

---

[1] This issue of the Journal *Japan Labor Review* relates to "career education," but it is important that curriculum is implemented in conjunction with extra-curricular programs implemented by staff organizations (excluding teaching staff) of the employment department/career center. It is usual to refer to both of these activities together "career support" and in this paper, in the main, the phrase "career support" is used.

[2] The proportion of students continuing education to university level shown in Figure 1 shows the proportion of students continuing education in each category of universities, junior colleges and professional training colleges to the 18-year-old proportion, including those students who graduated high school a year or more earlier. Using these figures means that the statistics include students who left high school but subsequently spent a period of time studying for entrance examinations before entering university. In fiscal 2007, 2.7% of university entrants were aged 25 or above, which is an extremely low proportion compared to other OECD countries (Central Education Council [2008, figure

Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, *School Basic Survey*.

Figure 1. Trends in the Size of the 18-Year-Old Population and the Number and the Proportion of Entry into Higher Education Institutions

quently began to rise swiftly, exceeding 50% for the first time in spring 2009 (50.2%).

There are three factors influencing this rise in the proportion of students continuing to university. The first was an expansion in student capacity at universities. During the 1990s, the trend towards the easing of regulations led to the relaxation of criteria for university foundation, leading to various junior colleges converting into universities, and a range of new university establishments, creating greater capacity for student entry. The second factor was a sudden worsening in employment opportunities for high school graduates. Subsequent to the bursting of the economic bubble in 1991, the ratio of jobs to applications for high school graduates (as of end November in the third year of high school) dropped swiftly from its peak in 1992 of 3.3:1 to 1.74:1 in 1995, and subsequently maintained a low level of around 1:1 between 2000 and 2005. Alongside this, the number of high school graduates who neither continued education nor entered employment grew swiftly, and began to become a social problem. For this reason, families with even a small amount of spare economic capacity have begun to send their children to university, considering that being a university graduate would provide an advantage in recruitment, thereby strengthening the trend towards students continuing to higher education. The third reason is the decline in the size of the 18-year-old population, as can be seen in Figure 1.

1-9]).

(2) Reduction in University Selection Function

The fact that universities' student capacity has increased at the same time as the 18-year-old population is decreasing means that the competition to acquire students among private universities, which make up around 80% of all institutions, has become severe. Many private universities have increased the proportion of students they attract through admission office entrance or referred entry, rather than through academic subject testing, so that now fewer than half of students (48.6%) enter university via standard entrance examinations (Central Education Council [2008, figure 2-26]).
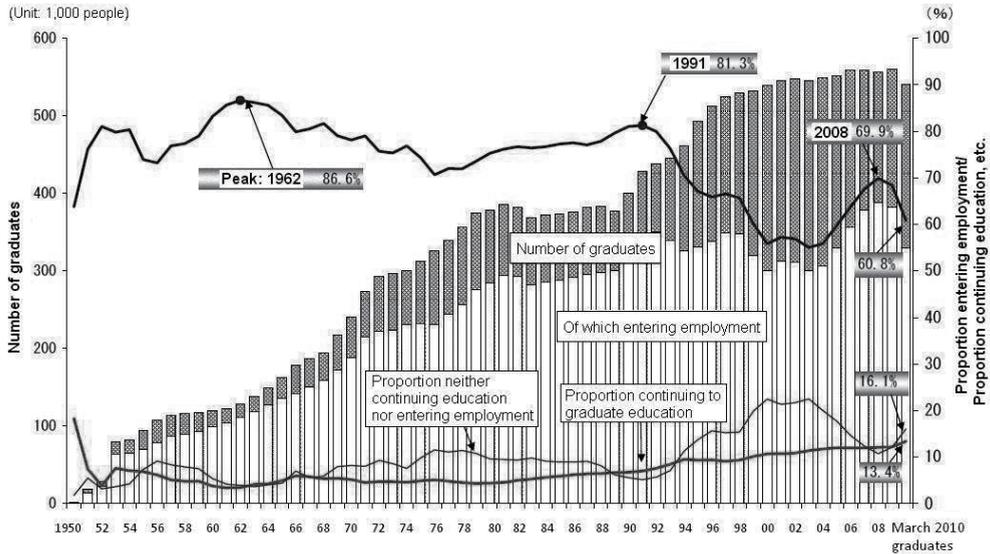
Standard entrance examinations at private universities have also reduced the number of test subjects. To sit general entrance for national and public universities, students are required to take first-stage tests in seven subjects, but conventionally, private universities only examine in three subjects, and an increasing number of universities and faculties now only examine in one or two subjects. Furthermore, in fiscal 2008, 47.1% of private universities (266 institutions) were under-enrolled, and in a certain number of universities where the number of students enrolled is significantly lower than the number of places available, it is true to say that the entrance tests are no longer playing a valid function in selecting students.

Conventionally, Japanese universities are said to be "difficult to enter, but easy to graduate from." The requirements for graduation may have been relatively relaxed, but the function of entrance tests to select students was highly effective. At present, however, other than a few top-level institutions, the situation has become one in which university is "easy to enter and easy to graduate from." This has led to a decreasing amount of study being done by high school students. According to research done by Motohisa Kaneko et. al., the time spent in studying by students at senior high school on weekdays during the autumn of their third year was, even in the case of those students who decided to continue their education to university level in March of their third year, reported as "up to 2 hours" by around half of them, which includes those studied "almost none" by around 20%. (Center for Research on University Management and Policy, Graduate School of Education, University of Tokyo 2007). As a result, universities are now accepting students who do not have enough basic academic abilities, and lack any desire to learn proactively.

(3) Reduced Rate of University Graduate Employment

This vicious spiral has also been reflected in the situation regarding recruitment and employment of university graduates (Figure 2). In a survey of students graduating in March 1990, in May of the same year (two months after graduation), 6.8% of students had carried on into graduate studies, 81.0% had found employment, and 5.6% had neither entered graduate studies nor found a job. The proportion of graduates finding employment fell drastically, however, to 55.0% by 2003, with 27.1% of students entering neither graduate education nor employment in the same year (including those entering temporary work).

Of course, the long-term period of recession following the bursting of the economic bubble, which caused a sudden decrease in job offers to graduates, is also a factor in the

Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, *School Basic Survey.*
Note: "Neither continuing education nor entering employment" indicates those clearly not en-
     gaged either in continuing education (graduate school, professional training college or study
     overseas) nor entering employment, but rather living at home and helping with chores, etc.
     Of those people, figures for before 1987 include those who entered "temporary employ-
     ment," and figures for before 2003 include those studying at "professional training college
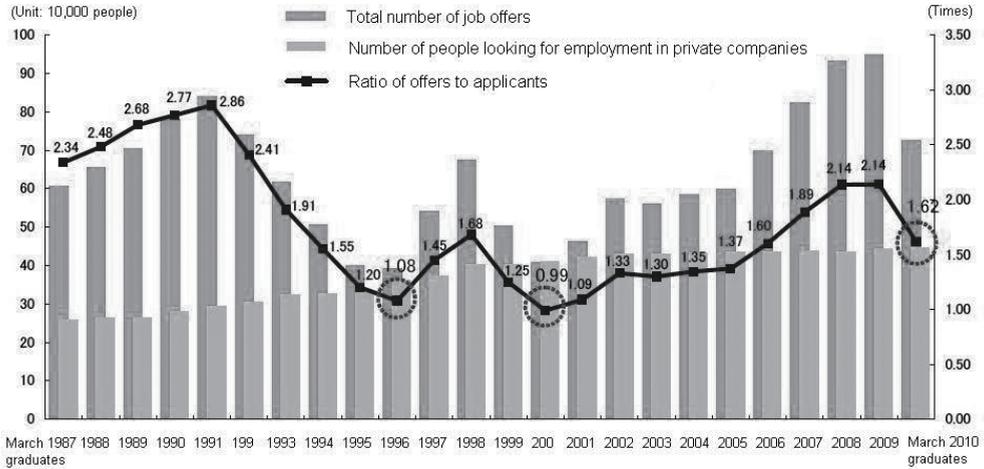   or overseas.*"*

Figure 2. Progress by University Graduates

background to this decrease in employment rates (Figure 3). As seen in Figure 2, however,
during this period, the actual number of university graduates who began employment did
not decrease particularly significantly. A bird's-eye view of the situation shows that the in-
crease in number of university graduates in the 1990s may have manifested itself almost
entirely in the increased number of graduates neither "continuing education" nor "entering
employment."

     Subsequently, as seen in Figure 3, the number of job offers began to recover in the
late 2000s, and as seen in Figure 2, the proportion of students engaged in neither education
nor employment began to fall. The global economic recession beginning in 2008, however,
resulted in a significant depression in the number of job offers for graduates in March 2010,
and the employment status of graduates has taken another sudden turn for the worse. As a
result of an increase in university graduates, the proportion of graduates entering employ-
ment has become far more sensitive to prevailing economic trends.

2.   Changes to the Graduate Recruitment Process in Corporations
     Next, let us take a look at the changes that have taken place in the graduate recruit-

Figure 3. Total Number of Job Offers, Number of People Looking for Employment in Private Companies, and Ratio of Offers to Applicants, in Regard to University Students and Graduate Students Expected to Graduate the Following Spring

ment process in corporations. To summarize, these changes have resulted in a switch from a situation where universities and corporations had a semi-institutional linkages that provided strong and comparatively stable matching, to one in which students are uncertain and confused as they engage with a longer-term job search activities without any firm prospects for the future.

(1) The Semi-Institutional Linkages between Universities and Corporations

Until the 1970s, a proportion of graduate recruitment was covered by corporations that recruited only from their preferred universities (the "reserved university") (Kariya and Honda 2010). Subsequent to this, the reserved university system for the recruitment of science graduates remained in place, but it became standard for universities not to contribute in a systematic way to job search activities by arts and humanities students, but rather let students and corporations engage in recruitment and job search activities in a freer way ("open recruitment").

Despite this, at the start of the 1990s, there were, in fact, a significant number of semi-institutional linkages between universities and corporations. An "information gap" existed, where recruitment information was sent only to students of their preferred universities (Toyoda 2007), and a system known as "Visit to Alumni," whereby current students visited their university graduates prior to recruitment selection processes and initiated in-

formal contact, effectively played the function of connecting students of designated universities (particularly top-level institutions) with designated corporations (Kariya and Honda 2010).

The fact that only students at relatively high-level universities had the opportunity to be recruited by top-level corporations presented some restrictions to individual students, but it is possible to think that the system has had the merit of facilitating relatively stable matching, allowing students who had been admitted to universities with high selection standards to be recruited by equivalent companies. With the growth of the Internet, however, in the late 1990s, "open recruitment" became more common, leading to greater individualization, but also greater instability.

(2) Increasingly Individualized, Complex and Long-Term Job Search Activities from 3rd Year Onwards

Nowadays, university students gradually begin activities related to job search from around the June of their third year. In June, internet sites that support third-year students in finding employment "pre-open," and begin to distribute information about companies that offer summer vacation internships.[3] In October, the Internet employment support websites open fully. There are three or four major sites, and it appears quite difficult to proceed subsequently with job search activities if a student does not register with one or more of these sites.

Students register their personal information on these sites, and can then search through companies wishing to hire university graduates. If they find a company in which they are interested, they can implement "entry" procedures, which notify the company in question of their interest. From the autumn of their third year, the companies hold corporation or industry explanatory meetings either at the university or at their offices. Subsequently, students select companies by which they wish to be screened, and from around December onwards during their third year, they begin submitting their entry sheets and résumés. If they pass the selection process involving entry sheets and résumés, they will next undertake written tests and be interviewed. Most interviews with major companies take place between March of the third year and April—June of the fourth year in several stages. Students who do not achieve a formal appointment during this time continue their job search during the summer holidays and from the autumn onwards.

In this way, if the internship in the summer vacation of the third year is included, stu-

---

[3] Internships began to be widely used in Japan at the end of the 1990s, but most of the internships on offer are not long-term internships to which the university contributes, which are linked to a student's faculty education. Rather, these internships are provided independently by corporations, and range from a few days to a week, or for only one day in some cases. The contents of internships are also less geared to allowing students to experience actual work, and in many cases consist more of implementing mock proposals, undertaking various miscellaneous tasks and visiting different departments. For students, even this type of internship, which is perhaps lacking in content, appears to offer advantages in job search, and most of them will try quite hard to experience some sort of internship.

dents' job search activities nowadays begin in the early stages of the specialist study period of a university course, and continue over a long period of time, taking between a year to a year and a half.[4]

The increasing use of the Internet has led to increasing levels of recruitment information from companies that students can access individually. It is extremely difficult, however, for students to determine which company they might like to work for, or by whom they may have the possibility of being employed, from that information. As a result, many students end up spending a large amount of time and effort in trying to make sense of their own job search.

At the same time as these processes become more complex and start to take place over a longer period, students are also increasingly required to implement them individually. Some corporations still implement company explanation meetings within universities, but students can also engage with individual companies through applying to explanation meetings, internet "entry," submitting entry sheets and résumés, taking written tests or interviews, etc. For this reason, students are required to be highly proactive and have decision-making skills in a range of areas, in order to understand what industry or company they should apply to, how many companies they should engage in job search activities with, and how to balance job search activities with their university studies, etc.

(3) Recruitment Screening in Which Screening Criteria Are Unclear

Often, students are not sure what is required during screening processes, such as in document screening via entry sheets and résumés, written tests or interviews, etc., as information relating to what they majored in, at what university is not clearly cited as an important part of the evaluation process. The selection criteria are often very difficult for them to understand. When applying to the screening process, students of the arts and humanities are not restricted by clear limits on what university they belong to and what they majored in the first place. Nevertheless, it appears that many companies merely implement first-stage screening by looking at the name of the university during entry sheet screening. Since this process happens behind closed doors, most applicants who do not make it through the entry sheet screening process never find out whether they were rejected because screening was

---

[4] Around 1990, there existed "recruitment agreements," which detailed the schedule for employment selection, between universities and corporations. According to these, students would begin to visit companies from August 20 in their fourth year, and from November 1, the companies were able to make formal appointments. In many cases, however, these "Recruitment agreements" were not abided by, and many companies in fact offered formal appointments to students at an earlier stage, leading to Keidanren, the leading integrated economic organization in Japan, to abolish the system in 1997. Subsequently, from 2004, Keidanren proposed an "Ethical constitution," aiming to introduce order to the recruitment process for newly graduating students, calling for it to be widely adopted by member corporations. The "Ethical constitution" published in October 2009 stipulates that no "interviews or other actual screening activities" are to be implemented during a student's third year. In fact, however, many companies that have signed up to the "Ethical constitution" still accept entry sheets and implement written tests, in order to select students for interview, during the third year.

done based on the name of their university or their major, or because the contents of their entry sheet were not evaluated highly enough.

In some cases, the questions asked on the entry sheet relate to areas such as "things you worked hard at while a student," "your strengths and weaknesses," "the reason you are applying to this company," and other issues, and nothing is asked relating to "the theme of your seminar class[5] and research." Many students tend to enter their experience in part-time jobs and club or group activities,[6] rather than in their studies, to questions relating to areas in which they have worked hard while in university, trying to show their "communication skills" and "independence," which corporations expect from them.

Other than for a small number of industries, such as the publishing industry, written tests tend not to be examining specialist knowledge required for the type or sector of work, but rather be weighted towards numerical problems examining a student's theoretical reasoning skills and/or calculation skills, reading comprehension skills or general knowledge, or (depending on the company) his or her English ability. In most cases, they do not test the knowledge a student has acquired from his or her major, but rather examine his or her basic academic abilities. They are often accompanied by personality tests.

At interview, students will be questioned on their motivation, and in addition, on the activities they focused on as students, and how they engaged with such activities. There is no particular restriction placed on the type of activity discussed. Regardless of the activity, students will be asked whether they engaged in it proactively, what role they played, what they thought about different aspects of the activity, and what efforts they made in regard to it. It is said that the company will try to assess a student's competency through these questions.

In this way, companies do not clearly state that their screening criteria include the university where students studied or their major, or even what they learned, but rather what sort of person they are, through a process of evaluating the whole person before making recruitment decisions. For this reason, while companies do include written tests, students do not see these as particularly assessing them on their academic abilities or specialism, and there is a tendency to try to "play" the sort of person the student imagines a company wishes to hire, both in written submissions and at interview. In general, the sort of person a company is looking to hire is someone proactive and positive with high levels of communication skills. Some companies also emphasize theoretical reasoning skills, but many com-

---

[5] The university seminar classes in Japan begin in a student's third year (second year in some universities). Most students belong to a seminar class operated by one particular member of the faculty, and the class involves proactive research by the students based on the specializations of that faculty member. In some universities/departments, seminar classes may be restricted in numbers and therefore only a proportion of students may belong to certain seminar class.

[6] "Club" activities are official university groups, mainly based on sport, while "group" activities may include sports, cultural activities, volunteer activities, or activities designed to promote the social lives of students. "Group" activities may be officially approved by the university and in receipt of support for their activities, or they may be unofficial groups.

panies do not state clearly that this is important. In terms of the specialist knowledge required of students of arts and humanities, many companies state that "none is required, since we will train them once they enter the company."

If students try to perform in interview in such a way as to align themselves with the type of person they think the company wishes to hire, however, this can lead to the contents of the interview being very unoriginal. Many students find themselves discussing the aspects of their part-time work, club or group activities that emphasize how proactive and positive they are, or how they have communication skills. Manuals have even been published, which explain how to talk in this way. Despite the fact that the contents of their interviews are similar, one student may be dropped while another may progress to the next stage of the screening process. Students often struggle to understand where the difference between these two results lies. For this reason, many students become confused by fragmented information relating to what techniques may allow them to pass the interview. Since students who fail at the interview level are not told the reason why they did not succeed, it is difficult for them to learn from their failure, and they often lose confidence, since they feel that their personality has been rejected in a process that focuses mainly on personality.

(4) Students at the Mercy of Job Search

Since the screening process is unclear to students, they often fear that they may end up with no formal appointments of employment, and as a result, become engaged in job search activities from an earlier point and over more time. Students are also applying to more and more companies for screening. As a result, they enter screening processes without spending sufficient time in researching either industries or companies, resulting in them either failing the screening process or being concerned that the company they are accepted by may not be the company they wanted to work for. On the other hand, as the job search process becomes more complicated, some students find it impossible to get going, and some give up at the early stages.

The extent to which the job search process has become so stressful is increasingly being identified as a problem. In 2008, a book was published under the title "*Shukatsu no Bakayaro* (stupid job search)" (Ishiwatari and Osawa 2008). It became a bestseller, and was widely read by many students. The title perfectly expressed the honest feeling that many students had about the stresses of the job search activities, and its subtitle ("The farce played out by companies, universities and students") expressed the distortion of the current job search/recruitment activities situation.

II. Measures by Universities to Support Student Careers

1. Switching over from Job Search Support to Career Support
(1) Measures by Universities That Are "Good at Employment"

Finally, we are ready to discuss career support offered at universities. As stated above,

the proportion of students continuing into further education is increasing, and the mere fact of being a graduate no longer provides a significant advantage within the youth labor market. Job search has become more complicated, it begins earlier and takes longer, and this means that there is a strong possibility that without career support from the university, many students may not be able to reach a formal appointment. In addition, since the bursting of the economic bubble, with employment restrictions in place with many companies, the reality is that there is now a significantly reduced rate of graduate employment.

Against this background, at the start of the 21st century, high school students and their parents began to look to universities that were "good at employment," in other words those universities that posted good graduate employment figures. Many universities also began activities to position themselves as "good at employment," seeing it as a way to survive the competition. So what makes a university "good at employment"?

The first thing that many universities have done is to introduce support activities that assist with the job search itself, such as giving guidance on writing entry sheets and taking interviews, offering individual guidance, creating and strengthening networks with alumni, corporations and the university, putting together internship and various other job search support programs, supplying information regarding job offers, implementing job search guidance over a number of sessions, etc.

As noted above, however, due to the individualization and complexity of, early start to and long time spent in job search, universities have also identified a need to support students in becoming engaged in the job search process itself. For this reason, some universities have begun implementing aptitude testing as early as in the first year, in order to consider what sort of job each student is suited to, and encouraging students to think about work from their first year, through implementing programs under which human resources managers and young employees from corporations come to speak to students. Effectively this means that they are implementing "career support" from the first year onwards, not just "job search support" from the third year.

(2) The Role of the Career Center, and the Issue of Cooperation with Teaching Staff

In many cases, the measures introduced by universities to become "good at employment" have included a staff organization known as the "career center." Career centers are a restructured version of the "employment department" that has conventionally been found in most private universities.

Ritsumeikan University, which is a prestigious private university in the Kansai region, restructured its employment department into a career center in November 1999. It was the first high-level university to implement these changes, and many other universities followed suit, changing their employment departments into career centers.

In this way, many universities sought to become "good at employment" through the leadership of their career center, but encountered the problem of it being extremely difficult to implement changes to the curriculum, due to the fact that it required the agreement of the

faculty council. The career center may implement its own independent programs, but this support will not reach the students unless they make their own way to the career center, and for this reason, an increasing number of universities have now begun programs in which career support has been introduced to the curriculum. These include programs inviting human resources managers and young employees from companies as guests, to assist students in thinking specifically about the issues relating to work, programs that seek to assist young people who will begin work in the future to understand the changes that are occurring in society, such as globalization, diversification of employment formats, etc., and practical programs that improve communication skills through group work, as well as internships that allow students to gain credits. Even if these programs are, however, implemented as part of curricular education, they will still tend to exist as something of an "enclave" within the formal curriculum structure of the major subject implementing them, under the category of "career education courses," and since many of the classes are taught by external specialists, or by full-time teaching staff with a limited range, they tend not to link enough to the rest of the formal curriculum. In many cases, this has resulted in teaching staff in the rest of the department paying scant attention to what is being taught.

Here, I should like to introduce some data that allows us to consider this situation. In November 2005, the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) implemented a "Survey into the state of student lifestyle support by universities" (JASSO 2006). According to this survey, whilst more than 70% of universities were implementing some sort of career support, only 41.4% of universities responded "Implementing systematically" when asked "Are you systematically implementing measures to support employment and career formation?"

Furthermore, when the author of this paper implemented a survey in March 2006 in regard to career support managers for higher education institutions, despite the fact that 85.1% of institutions responded that "It is desirable for elements of career support and career education to be integrated with the education offered in the major subject," only 47.5% responded that "Full-time teaching staff are proactively contributing to career support/career education."

2. Toward Integrated Career Support
(1) Progressive Measures toward Integrated Career Support

As seen above, university career support has been led by efforts by career centers, which are staff organizations, and has not reached a state of being able to support student career activities throughout the whole curricular and extra-curricular programs. It is not as if the need for integrated support had not been pointed out. In 2006, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) defined "promotion of practical, integrated career education" as one of the themes of its "Support Program for Contemporary Educational Needs (Contemporary Good Practice)," and MEXT is now engaged in a promotional strategy whereby universities that engage in excellent measures are selectively awarded subsidies. In many universities, however, it is a fact that involving the faculty and

establishing the integrated career support cooperated with curriculum content have proved difficult.

Within this, however, there are some examples of situations in which the staff have been strong enough to influence the faculty in order to ensure the inclusion of career support elements in curriculum. One representative of this movement is the aforementioned Ritsumeikan University, which took the lead in restructuring its employment department into a career center, and where career education courses developed by the career center were included in curriculum as early as 2000. Subsequently, students at Ritsumeikan have been encouraged to think about their own career paths from their first year, and career education courses have been gradually included into curriculum in order to improve their motivation to learn (Uenishi 2007).

Furthermore, the private Kyoto Sangyo University has been noted for its cooperative education measures, which involve the formation of an internship system as part of the curriculum. This program, which received a subsidy from MEXT in fiscal 2004 as part of the "Support Program for Contemporary Educational Needs," puts their students in small-group career-related lesson programs from their first year onwards, as well as ensuring their participation in internships each year, resulting in the implementation of a sandwich-style program of education that involves coordinated on-campus educational programs and off-campus corporate and organizational internships.

(2) Strengthening of Demand for Integrated Career Support

More recently, MEXT has strengthened its demands on universities to provide integrated career support. The criteria for university establishment was changed in February 2010 (to be enforced from April 1, 2011 onwards) requiring all universities to include "Guidance etc. relating to Social and Vocational Independence (Career Guidance)" both within and outside their educational courses. Furthermore, applications were invited in April 2010 for a subsidy program entitled "Support for University Programs Developing Employment Skills of University Students," demanding universities to proactively get engaged in measures, both within and outside of the curriculum, which facilitate students in developing their employability that assists them to social and vocational independence.

Subsequent to these demands, it appears that various universities are beginning to engage in a range of trial measures.

3. Curriculum Called into Question
(1) Developing Versatile Basic Abilities

These trial measures, however, have raised the question of what and how students should learn as a part of their university education.

The area on which various stakeholders are agreed is that students should learn "versatile basic abilities." In relation to this point, MEXT's advisory agency, the Central Education Council (2008) defined in December 2008 some reference indicators for the "academic

ability" required to obtain a bachelor's degree, which should be developed in all major courses focusing on learning outcomes. These were (i) knowledge/understanding, (ii) versatile skills, (iii) attitudes/orientation, (iv) integrated learning experiences and comprehensive reasoning skills. The versatile skills required included i) communication skills, ii) quantitative skills, iii) information literacy, iv) theoretical reasoning skills, and v) problem solving abilities. The "attitudes/orientation" required included i) self-management, ii) teamwork and leadership, iii) ethical perspective, iv) social responsibility as a citizen, and v) ability to engage in lifelong learning.

The need for students to acquire these "learning outcomes" is unlikely to be disputed by anyone. The problem, however, is how to engage students in the process of acquiring such "learning outcomes."

(2) The Difficulty of Motivating Students to Acquire Versatile Basic Abilities

As stated in I above, many universities in Japan currently exist in a state of being "easy to enter and easy to graduate from." In this situation, outside of a certain number of top-level institutions, it appears to be easy to find students who may attend lectures, but have no real involvement in autonomous study. Motohisa Kaneko and his fellow researchers implemented surveys of university students, which showed that while attendance at lectures averaged 87.4%, more than 60% of students reported that they had "no interest or engagement with the lessons being taught," and that 70% of students considered that the statement "I attend lectures after implementing the required preparation or revision" either "did not apply at all" or "did not particularly apply" to them. Furthermore, 40% of students reported that they spent "0 hours" per week on study that "has no direct relationship to lectures" during the school term (Center for Research on University Management and Policy, Graduate School of Education, University of Tokyo 2008).

Detailed guidance will be necessary for such students before they will be able to acquire the "learning outcomes" described above. Many universities have implemented their education via large-group lecture-style lessons, based on an assumption that students are self-motivated to study. The reality is that this system has continued to create graduates that leave university without ever achieving the "learning outcomes" above. These students are highly unlikely to achieve results in their job search. From the perspective of career support, therefore, they require not only job search support, but also support in acquiring basic academic skills.

(3) Measures Taken at Various Universities

This sort of learning support can take many forms. Universities that are "good at employment," such as the private Kanazawa Institute of Technology, implement academic abilities testing of students on entry, and where students do not demonstrate sufficient ability to undertake specialist education in areas such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, etc., they are required to take lessons in basic mathematics. The institution also provides individual

teaching, group guidance and e-learning systems, in order to ensure that individual students gain the basic academic abilities they require.

Some universities are providing training at even more basic levels. At the Kansai-based private university to which Igami (2010) is affiliated, many students enter the university lacking basic techniques and abilities for study, and student opinions of university lectures includes honest expressions of lack of interest, describing teaching as "boring" and "meaningless." In general, many teaching staff merely complain about the attitude of students, but Igami and his colleagues are engaged in measures to correct the problems these students face, so as to ensure that they gain basic academic abilities they are lacking from primary education such as the concept of proportion, and that they establish good learning habits.

In other examples, one university has full-time teaching staff who teach first year students compulsory practical courses in small groups to ensure that students learn how to write reports, and another offers support for students acquiring official vocational qualifications as a method of ensuring they acquire learning habits and self-confidence. In another example, a university uses an information system to ascertain the individual learning status of students from their first year, in order to prevent students from dropping out or having to retake a year, and encourage systematic learning.

Of course, universities that only take students with higher levels of academic achievement are also engaging in practical programs, such as project-based learning that aims to contribute to specific regional problems, or research themes in collaboration with corporations, which they anticipate will give good "learning outcomes." However, I should like to stress here that many universities are engaged not in highly progressive activities of this sort, but rather in much more gradual measures.

Furthermore, it is also important to draw attention to the fact that it is not always easy to engage students in such gradual measures. This is because, as mentioned in I-2-(3) above, many companies do not assess the actual study engaged in at university by students when recruiting, and that students feel that "even if they work hard at studying, this will not be appreciated in the process of recruitment selection." Additionally, as stated in I-2-(2) above, the increased complexity, early start and long duration of job search means that many students unavoidably spend a large proportion of their time in job search, and that once they become third year students, they quickly start to prioritize job search over and above study. It can be assumed that many companies do in fact include "academic achievement" as part of their evaluation of the "integrated whole person," but this in itself is too uncertain an objective to motivate students towards extending their abilities.

For this reason, some universities are now trying to guarantee an improvement in student abilities through making certain things obligatory, such as defining remedial education and basic education for academic skills as compulsory courses, or dictating that students who do not achieve a certain level of score in either TOEIC or TOEFL will not be able to move into the next academic year. At Hitotsubashi University, one of Japan's highest

ranking national universities, students who enter after April 2010 are required to achieve a minimum GPA as part of the condition of their graduation. Up until recently, students were able to graduate from Japanese universities merely by achieving the required number of credits, even if the results achieved to gain those credits were barely acceptable, but this becomes impossible in cases where a particular GPA is required for graduation. It remains to be seen whether other universities begin to adopt this same system.

(4) "Flexpeciality"

In addition to "versatile basic abilities," should faculty education have more relevance to work? This topic is attracting attention as a significant area of discussion, but it appears to the author that no agreement has yet been reached among stakeholders.

Conventionally, with the exception of teacher training departments, it appears that arts and humanities departments at Japanese universities paid scant attention to the issue of providing an education that would equip students for a career in a designated sector of employment. This was partly due to the fact that many teaching staff were out of touch with business trends, but it was also to do with the fact that corporations hired new graduates with little or no attention to the specialist knowledge they possessed, and without restricting them to a particular post, subsequently engaging them in both on-the-job and off-the-job training that enabled them to acquire the required skills. Companies that would require a level of specialist knowledge from science graduates simply did not look for this among arts and humanities graduates. This situation has hardly changed today.

As stated above, however, since it is no longer possible to ignore the proportion of students who graduate from university without being engaged as full employees of a company, it appears unrealistic for universities to only count on post-employment training from the view point of ensuring students' interests. This highlights the issue of the relevance of education to work.

Yuki Honda is a leading figure in this debate. Stating that Japanese education is extremely lacking in vocational relevance when viewed from an international perspective, she coins the term "flexpeciality" (a combination of the words "flexible" and "speciality"), and states that this ought to be taught to students as part of their educational courses (Honda 2009). "Flexpeciality" is a specialism that is studied in order to act as a stepping-stone to broader related areas, and Honda states that such specialities are those that enable people to keep up with the changes in society. She recommends "flexpeciality" not only as a hedging of risk against the possibility of not being engaged as a full employee, but also as a means of protecting oneself against the trend in society that requires "versatile basic abilities" and excessive pressures of the recruitment screening process that evaluates the "whole person." While she accepts that communication skills and versatile basic abilities will be required in order to survive in the future, she criticizes current career education, which she says does not provide direction or indicators for how to acquire these abilities.

These opinions of Honda's are becoming more and more influential, and as its name

suggests, the Central Education Council's "Career Education/Vocational Education Special Working Group," which was formed in December 2008 being consulted by MEXT, began to look seriously at the theme of "vocational education." Commissioned by MEXT, the Science Council of Japan also carried out a "Study of Quality Assurance by Sector of University Education,"[7] the results of which (Science Council of Japan 2010) showed that there is currently no functioning link between universities and work, and that there is a need for this link to be recovered through improving the relevance of university education to work.

However, the concept of "flexpeciality" of this type and the current emphasis on vocational education, have so far been met with a cool reception within industry, and the future of this movement is unclear.

(5) "Application" and "Resistance"

Another notable aspect of university career support is the need for students to learn the basic knowledge to protect themselves at work while still in school, such as gaining knowledge of labor law and labor unions. Honda (2009) states that, in order to be prepared for the world of work, students need to be taught both methods to "apply themselves" and methods to "resist." "Flexpeciality" is a method for applying oneself, while basic knowledge of labor law provides a method for resistance when, for example, unreasonable demands are placed upon one at work. Nowadays many people encounter serious problems in the workplace, such as long working hours, unpaid overtime, unjust layoffs, mental imbalance such as depression, etc., and the issue of "black companies," who force employees into indecent work practices, is also recognized as a social problem. Many young people, however, do not know what is illegal or unreasonable, and how to respond if they are placed in such a situation, because they have entered labor market with insufficient knowledge to deal with these situations.

It would be difficult to say that university education has undertaken to provide training for "resistance." As Igami (2010) states, however, there are some examples appearing where universities have begun to implement labor education as part of their career education programs.

III. Conclusions

This paper introduced the situation surrounding university career support. A brief summary of the main discussion points is as below.

As increasing proportion of students choose to continue their education to university, the mere fact of being a graduate no longer provides a significant advantage within the

---

[7] The committee who met to consider this issue was made up mainly of university researchers, with Yuki Honda playing a central leading role as director.

youth labor market. In addition, with job search becoming more individualized, complex, starting earlier and taking longer to complete, universities are increasingly required to provide career support. This was initially considered to be supporting students through job search, but more recently demands have been increasing for curricular and extra-curricular educational activities to provide integrated career support for students. As part of this, the contents of curriculum have also been called into question, with the relevance of current university education to work being particularly under scrutiny. It could be said that universities are being called to answer the question of what exactly their significance is for young people in the first place.

While it is still unclear just how Japanese employment practices and human resources development will change in the future, it is not at all simple for universities and their staff to provide the answers to these questions. The problems of current job search and recruitment screening are currently shared broadly between universities, students and corporations, however, and it may be that this is increasing momentum for universities and corporations to work together in considering the role of universities, and recruitment methods.

References

Center for Research on University Management and Policy, Graduate School of Education, University of Tokyo. 2007. *Kokosei no shinro tsuiseki chosa, dai-ichi-ji hokokusho* [Survey following the career path of high school students: First report]. Compiled and issued by CRUMP, Graduate School of Education, University of Tokyo in September 2007. http://ump.p.u-tokyo.ac.jp/crump/resource/crumphsts.pdf (accessed November 30, 2010).

———. 2008. *Zenkoku daigakusei chosha, dai-ichi-ji hokokusho* [Nationwide survey of university students: First report]. Compiled and issued by CRUMP, Graduate School of Education, University of Tokyo in May 2008. http://ump.p.u-tokyo.ac.jp/crump/resource/ccs%20report1.pdf (accessed November 30, 2010).

Central Education Council. 2008. Gakushi katei kyoiku no kochiku ni mukete (toshin) [Toward the creation of bachelor education (report)]. Compiled and issued by Central Education Council, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology on December 24, 2008. http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo0/toushin/1217067.htm (accessed November 30, 2010).

Honda, Yuki. 2009. *Kyoiku no shokugyoteki igi* [The vocational relevance of education]. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo.

Igami, Ko. 2010. Non erito daigakusei ni tsutaerubeki koto [What do we have to tell to non-elite university students?]. *The Japanese Journal of Labour Studies* 52, no. 9:27-38.

Ishiwatari, Reiji, and Hitoshi Osawa. 2008. *Shukatsu no bakayaro* [Stupid job search]. Tokyo: Kobunsha.

Japan Student Services Organization. 2006. Daigakuto ni okeru gakusei seikatu shien no jittai chosa [Survey on the state of student lifestyle support by universities]. Compiled and issued by Japan Student Services Organization on June 30, 2006. http://www.g-shiendb.jasso.go.jp/gsdb/main/tmp/contents/ab00141.html (accessed November 30, 2010).

Kariya, Takehiko, and Yuki Honda, eds. 2010. *Daisotsu shushoku no shakaigaku* [The sociology of graduate employment]. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

Science Council of Japan. 2010. Kaito: Daigaku kyoiku no bunyabetsu shitsuhosho no arikata ni tsuite [Reply: Study of quality assurance by sector of university education]. Compiled and issued by the exploratory committee of Science Council of Japan on July 22, 2010. http://www.scj.go.jp/ja/info/kohyo/pdf/kohyo-21-k100-1.pdf (accessed November 30, 2010).

Toyoda, Yoshihiro. 2007. "*Rikunabi*" no tojo ga shinsotsu shijo ni motarashita hikari to kage [Light and shade brought to the new graduate market by the arrival of *Rikunavi* or recruitment information websites]. *The Japanese Journal of Labour Studies* 49, no. 4:62-64.

Uenishi, Mitsuko. 2007. Daigaku ni okeru kyaria shien: Sono doko [Trends in university career support]. In *Daigaku no kyaria shien* [University career support], ed. Mitsuko Uenishi, ch. 1. Tokyo: Keiei Shoin.