



**EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS TOWARDS  
THE DIDACTIC STAFF AS FACTORS CONDITIONING  
THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY'S  
RELATIONAL CAPITAL**

## EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS TOWARDS THE DIDACTIC STAFF AS FACTORS CONDITIONING THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY'S RELATIONAL CAPITAL

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### Summary

The dynamically changing social-economic environment in which universities operate required from them in the recent years taking measures aimed at introducing significant changes in the area of conducted marketing activity. However, a typical composition of marketing instruments requires a different approach due to the specific character of the branch and the targeted client.

The purpose of this article is the identification of expectations with regard to the implementation of educational services, as well as the role and influence of didactic personnel on the processes of building a university's image. The identified expectations may have a major impact on the future personnel policy of university authorities, also in the context of "Constitution for Science" and new proposals which are supposed to elevate the role and significance of the didactic personnel.

On the basis of a survey conducted among the students of a public university, the author of the article draws important conclusions concerning the student-lecturer relationship, which reflecting the respondents' opinions constitute a basis for proposing solutions aimed at supporting the didactic personnel in their effort to bring perfection to the processes of education and cooperation with students.

**Keywords: brand, brand identity, university, university brand management**



## Introduction

As of November 30, 2017 1,291,900 people were studying at universities. This means the number of students decreased by 56.900, compared to the previous year. Thus, the number of people studying in Poland returned to the level from the academic year 1998/1999, when it was close to 1,266,000. Since the academic year 2005/2006 in which the number of people studying in Poland reached the historical maximum of 1,953,800, the number of students has been systematically dropping (MNiSW, 2013). A significant drop of the number of graduates has been observed since the academic year 2011/2012 (GUS, 2018). Over the last decade almost 33% of clients disappeared from the market of educational services provided by universities. In the same period the number of universities dropped from 456 in the academic year 2008/2009 (GUS, 2009) to 390 in the academic year 2016/17 (GUS, 2017). Additionally, the number of students was regulated by regulations concerning the method of allocation of subsidies from the state budget for public and non-public universities, contained in the Resolution of the Minister of Science and Higher Education from December 7, 2016. According to the resolution, there can be no more than 13 students for every academic teacher at a public university.

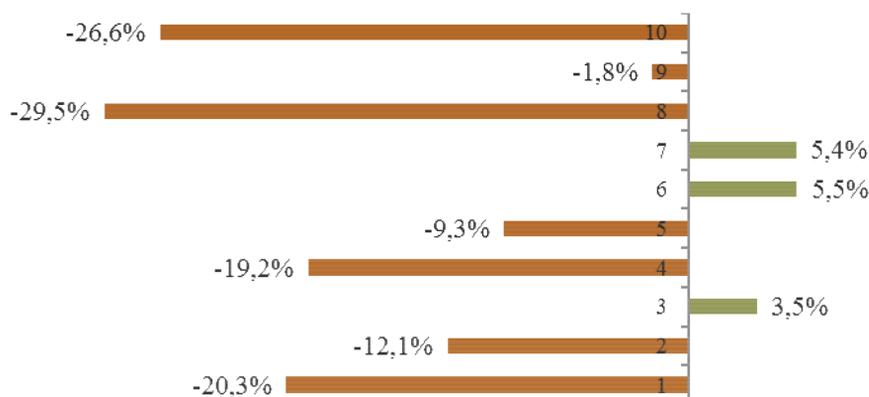
The statistics for the sector of educational services are disturbing. Changes in its structure and functioning are the effects of an evolving social-economic situation conditioning the current functioning of universities. For a few years the most popular claim has been that the demographic decline has led to the reduction of the number of students. Looking at the number of students in top 10 universities in Poland, according to the Perspektywy ranking (2018), we can clearly confirm this thesis (Table 1). In case of 7 universities the trend is negative. At the same time, in case of 3 universities a positive trend has been observed (Chart 1), which can be recognized as a contradiction to the thesis that the biggest problem that public universities have to cope with is the issue of dropping number of students as a result of purely demographic reasons.

Table 1. Comparison of the number of students in 2008 and 2016

	31.12. 2008	31.12. 2016	Growth/Drop of the total number of students
1. University of Warsaw	55 973	44 622	-11 351
2. Jagiellonian University in Kraków	46 542	40 905	-5 637
3. Warsaw University of Technology	31 101	32 174	1 073
4. Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań	46 817	37 847	-8 970
5. AGH University of Science and Technology in Kraków	31 589	28 653	-2 936
6. Wrocław University of Technology	32 274	34 043	1 769
7. Gdańsk Medical University	4 936	5 204	268
8. University of Wrocław	36 874	26 014	-10 860
9. Gdańsk University of Technology	21 638	21 241	-397
10. Silesian University of Technology	29 118	21 366	-7 752

Source: Own materials prepared on the basis of (GUS, 2008, p.104-114; GUS, 2016, p.70-79).

Chart 1. Growth/drop of the number of students in top 10 universities from the university ranking for 2018, in percent



Source: Own materials prepared on the basis of (GUS, 2008, p.104-114; GUS, 2016, p.70-79).

Over the past twenty years our civilization has experienced significant social-cultural changes covering all aspects of our life: new family model, processes of globalization, evolution of information technologies and its impact on the change of the model and forms of interpersonal

communication. Among the factors that can be recognized as factors which determine the success of some universities in the area of maintaining, or raising the number of students there are, above all: the ability to adapt quickly to market requirements by continuous adaptation of the educational offer, changing the model from a traditional "school management" to a business model, reevaluating the role and significance of didactic personnel by introducing a system of assessment and motivation of scientific-didactic employees and implementation of the concept of marketing of services, which is based on bilateral communication and building partnership in relations between the students and the lecturer.

According to Gordon (1999), relationship marketing is a continuous process of searching for and creating new value with individual clients and sharing the benefits generated in an existing partner relationship. As opposed to classic transaction marketing, in relationship marketing there is no focus on single purchase, but on maintaining a lasting bond with the client, which perfectly fits in the concepts of university's marketing activity. Relationship marketing is a strategy which is supposed to support loyalty, interaction and long-term engagement (Kumar, 2014, p. 1045). The goal of deliberations based on the surveys conducted among the recipients of didactic services, that is, students, presented in the article is identification of students' expectations with regard to the provision of educational services, as well as the role and influence of didactic personnel on the processes of creating the image of a university in relationship with the recipients of educational services.

## University brand management

One of important aspects of university brand management is building in the market environment the feeling of trust that the process of education satisfies the quality requirements of key stakeholders of a university. This feeling of trust is built by means of a university brand. Brand, according to Chartered Institute of Marketing, is "a collection of physical features of a product, or service together with the convictions and expectations associated with them — a unique association evoked in the

awareness of the recipients by the name, or the logo of product, or service." (Dryl, 2012, p. 44). Brand has its material dimension in form of image identification: name, logo, symbol, as well as non-material dimension which constitutes the whole collection of associations, convictions and values associated with a given product/service, created in the awareness of the client, which shapes his attitudes and market behaviour with regard to a given brand (Szwajca, 2012, p. 123). With regard to a university the concept of brand is associated with the conducted process of education and the research process. In course of deliberations about the university brand it is necessary to take into consideration the elements inseparably connected with it (see: Dawidziuk, 2012, p. 390; Białoń, 2012, p. 368–369):

- scientific-didactic personnel,
- plans, programs and methods of education,
- conditions of education,
- administrative staff,
- technical maintenance,
- technical, laboratory facilities and the owned infrastructure,
- cooperation with units from the sphere of science and business,
- care about relations in the internal and external environment,
- university's social responsibility.

In order to achieve a full image of university brand, it is necessary to connect the above elements with brand identity. According to Altkorn, brand identity is a vision of potential reception of a brand by the consumer, or the desired way a brand is perceived, created by the brand's sponsor (Altkorn, 1999, p. 39). University's identity is a vision, representation and associations with a university created by the managers and employees in the environment. It is inseparably associated with the concept of university image, which constitutes a collection of subjective associations of the recipients with a brand. Identity belongs to the interior of an organization. This is where it is created and later conveyed to the market environment. The functioning image of a university is a real, developed image of a brand, its perception existing in the awareness of university's stakeholders. It constitutes the factual reflection of identity, or how the proposed identity has been received by the recipients and how they have interpreted it.

Building the image of a university requires the following (Białoń, 2012, p. 370):

- defining the mission, goals and strategies of a university, which constitute the foundation of an adopted university identity which is the basis for the creation of image,
- defining the main internal and external stakeholders who will be the targets of the message,
- working out efficient marketing tools adapted to university's needs and appropriate for the assumed groups of stakeholders,
- implementation and monitoring of the developed system of marketing instruments.

Identity and image are inseparable elements associated with brand. They determine its essence and the adopted strategy of management. Brand management is a process of brand creation and maintaining its competitive position in the life cycle of the brand. Universities managing their brand effectively have to engage all their resources in actively informing the market about their identity in order to: draw attention, raise interest in their offer, deepen engagement and build loyalty. Kotler et al. (2010, p. 53) propagate the concept of brand management based on "brand personality" proposing the 3i model which includes: brand identity, brand integrity and brand image. In this context what forms brand integrity of a university are its experience and prestige, as well as independence developed on the market, distinguishing it from competition and facilitating competition on the market of educational services (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, Sen, 2012, p. 407–408).

In the process of university brand management which is supposed to lead to a competitive position on the market of educational services, it is necessary to remember that higher values (among others, academic traditions), as well as mission and work for the community in closer and further environment play an important role in the functioning of a university (Piróg, 2014, p.118).

## Sector of educational services and the contemporary challenges of the market

The current approach to the role of a university in the environment requires taking into consideration diverse external relations existing between the university and its stakeholders under new conditions: legal and economic conditions created by the market environment (Pluta-Olearnik, 2009, p. 12–13). Educational service constitutes a deliberate and organized sequence of relations taking place between an academic teacher who sells his knowledge, or skills and the student who acquires these skills (Zieliński, Lewandowski, 2012, p. 46). Contemporary universities have become typical service providers developing marketing strategies and managing marketing mix instruments in order to reach current and potential students (Durvasula, Lysonski, Madhavi, 2011, p. 3–4). Taking into consideration marketing rules and practices in university management makes it possible to improve its image and to develop it in the areas adapted to the needs and expectations of the environment. An evolution in the perception of universities as organizations serving didactic and scientific-research functions has taken place, as growing competition enforced perceiving them as typical "research companies" in the service sector (Siwiński, 2013, p. 129). To carry out these tasks it is necessary to have the appropriate resources and universities compete for these resources on the market (see: Pluta-Olearnik, 2009, p. 19; Adamska, 2011, p. 46–50):

- client capital (students, participants of postgraduate courses, doctoral students),
- human capital (academic teachers, administration employees),
- financial capital (funds for research and development, funds for didactic activity, EU funds, sponsors' support),
- market capital (institutions from the market environment: foundations and associations, scientific institutes, foreign universities, entrepreneurs, self-government)
- brand capital (position in university ranking, image in the environment, brand on the education market).

Among the mentioned resources one of the most important ones is human capital, which is the pillar of a university's intellectual capital. Intellectual capital constitutes the sum of knowledge held by people forming a particular community and the ability to transform it into components of value (Bratnicki, Strużyna, 2001, p. 69). The sector of educational services, on each of its levels, is work based on human resources. Human capital is formed by people and their competences, which are a combination of inborn talents, physical and psychological predispositions, followed social values and acquired skills and knowledge. The intellectual potential of an employee is his, or her energy, engagement, personal and professional attitude, intellect, ability to accept changes, the will to learn continuously, creativity, ability to work in a group, focus on own and team goals, as well as personal motivation. Academic teachers are responsible for, obviously with appropriate support from the infrastructure of the university, for carrying out educational services. A contemporary client wants the service to be provided in a creative way utilizing innovative forms of education. Universities' creativity in the area of active policy of managing relations with the recipients of educational services should mean searching for, creating and delivering new values, assuming that they are organizations which are (Styś, 2004, 24):

- sensitive, reacting quickly to the changes of needs and preferences of clients,
- active, they adapt to, or independently create markets,
- flexible, they adapt their marketing strategies, reacting to changing expectations of the market, but also forestall changes.

It is necessary to remember that proper functioning of a university is conditioned by the existence of an academic community, which is a group identity created by the academic environment (Fazlagić, 2013). University's identity is understood as a sum of elements identifying and distinguishing it in a competitive market environment (Cenker, 2007, p. 42). It is an expected reception of the brand image formed by university's resources, which constitutes a complicated construct of marketing tools, which contributes to a comprehensive message about the brand conveyed to the recipients (Altkorn, 1999, p. 39).

The proposed educational offer is conditioned by resources and capacities of a given university, however, clients' expectations have a crucial impact. Identification of the expectations of stakeholder groups concerning the quality of educational services and at the same time unequivocal understanding of these needs constitutes a basis for perfecting measures. The relationship between expectations and the actually achieved value shapes the level of satisfaction and thus influences attachment to a brand (Nicolescu, 2009, p. 38). Thus, a challenge for university marketing managers, who develop marketing activities in this specific sector, is defining in what way a service is created, implemented, consumed and perceived (Durvasul et al., 2011, p. 3–4).

### **The significance of didactic personnel in the process of university image management — based on the opinions of the recipients of educational services**

The goal of the research was learning the opinions of the recipients of educational services — students, concerning the role and significance of didactic personnel in the process of creation and management of university images, in the context of assessment and expectations with regard to the manner of implementation of the didactic process. The prepared survey questionnaire contained respondent's particulars and 8 research questions created by means of various research techniques. The starting basis for the creation of research instruments was a questionnaire used in a student survey concerning the assessment of classes and an academic teacher, which was an element of the POM01 procedure titled "The assessment and verification of the effects and programmes of education", which constitutes an integral part of the Education Quality Management System of Opole University of Technology. In course of work on the composition of the survey questionnaire for author's research cognitive issues concerning, among others, the assessment of scientific achievements, significance of professional, non-academic experience, ability to manage groups, etc. were taken into consideration. Also the used vocabulary and the neatness of clothing were taken into consideration.

On the basis of problems and research questions formulated within a thought map, the following directional research hypotheses were formulated, prepared according to Sztumski's proposition (2005, p. 55), on the basis of professional and personal experience:

- H1.** Student-lecturer relationships constitute a key factor for the process of building university's image.
- H2.** Students don't expect only a transfer of knowledge, but above all various forms of cooperation.
- H3.** The didactic personnel of a university should perfect its skills of professional support and counselling.

In course of work on the survey questionnaire various research questions were formulated. Among them there are the following:

1. What aspects associated with the didactic personnel do Students regard as important in course of cooperation?
2. To what extent do Students identify didactic personnel as a factor exerting influence on the formation of a university's image?
3. What forms of communication do Students recognize as most adapted to their expectations?
4. Is there a relationship between the assessment of the didactic personnel and the image of a university?

Presentation of issues picked from the research will concern the chosen research questions.

## Characteristics of the structure of research sample

The survey by means of the method of computer assisted web interview was conducted among the students from first and second cycle full-time studies at all faculties of Opole University of Technology between October 1 and 31, 2017.

The questionnaire prepared with the utilization of an Internet form was placed at: websites of chosen organizational units of the university, the profile of Opole University of Technology in the social media, the profile of Students' Self-Government, as well as on the profiles of particular faculties and students' science clubs. For the purpose of obtaining a representative sample in terms of distribution among particular faculties, the method of personal interview based on a paper questionnaire [PAPI — Paper & Pen Personal Interview] was used as support. The questionnaire in paper form

was distributed among students through employees from particular faculties.

The choice of the sample was random. The number of students at the beginning of the academic year 2017/18 was 6,412. Taking this population into consideration, the research sample should amount to 362 people with a maximum error of 5%.

During the collection of primary data 725 respondents displayed activity and thanks to this the maximum error amounted to 3%. Table 2 presents a distribution of respondents according to sex and year of studies. In the results of the survey we can see differences of a few percent in the general number of respondents who took part in the survey, as in a few cases no answer was given, 13 people didn't reveal their status and two respondents didn't reveal the year of studies and the level of studies.

Table 2. Respondents' particulars — share of respondents according to sex and year of studies

	Share of female students in %	Share of male students in %	Total
1st year	56.6	43.4	152
2st year	45.3	54.7	236
3st year	49.4	50.6	153
4st year	43.8	56.3	80
5st year	65.1	34.9	86
No entry	—	100.0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>49.2</b>	<b>712</b>

Source: Own materials

225 students from bachelor degree studies (31.25%), 239 students from engineering studies (33.1%) and 258 students from master's degree studies, representing all faculties of Opole University of Technology took part in the survey. The figures were compared to the number of students at particular faculties and thanks to this it was possible to compare the percentage of particular student groups in the research sample to the percentage of the general number of students at particular faculties (Table 3).

Summing up the data concerning the respondents' particulars, it is possible to conclude that a diversified research sample has been obtained (according to sex, year and level of studies for all faculties), thanks to this the results of the conducted survey should be recognized as representative.

Table 3. Respondents' particulars — share of respondents, according to faculties

Faculty	Total number of students	Share in total number of students in %	Number of students participating in the survey	Share in %
Civil Engineering and Architecture	928	14.5	107	14.8
Economics and Management	683	10.7	235	32.4
Electric Engineering, Automatic Control and Informatics	1 569	24.5	93	12.8
Production Engineering and Logistics	1 116	17.4	98	13.5
Technical Systems Engineering	25	0.4	3	0.4
Mechanical Engineering	885	13.8	50	6.9
Physical Education and Physiotherapy	1 206	18.8	139	19.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>6 412</b>		<b>725</b>	

Source: Own materials.

## Presentation of chosen issues addressed by the survey

The first question that the respondents were confronted with was a request to name the elements in the internal and external environment of the university that in their opinion have an impact on the formation of its image (Table 4). Thanks to this it was possible to identify the level of significance of factors selected for the survey, according to the assessment of the respondents.

Among seven distinguished elements which had an impact on the formation of university's image, the respondents highlighted mainly the internal factors: didactic personnel (from the perspective of assessment "very important" and "important" amount to almost 80%), university's infrastructure and position in university ranking. These are internal factors which are under influence of: pursued strategy of university management, activity in the research-scientific field and the adopted policy of human resources management, as well as the practiced organizational culture. Naming the didactic personnel as the most important factor shaping the image of a university confirms hypothesis H1. Interpersonal relations constitute a key factor for building the image of a university.

Table 4. Assessment of the significance of influence of chosen factors on the formation of a university's image

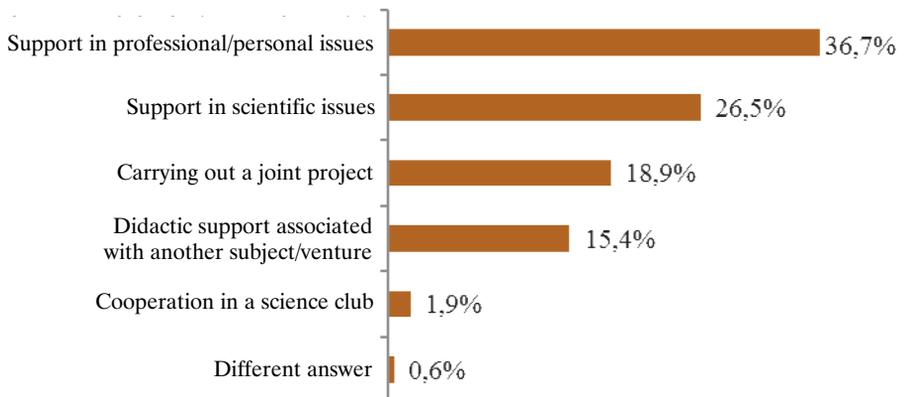
	Not important	Of little importance	Of medium importance	Important	Very important
City where university is located	4.6%	10.5%	27.4%	37.9%	19.6%
University's infrastructure	0.7%	3.7%	18.5%	36.0%	40.9%
Student life	3.0%	8.7%	25.3%	36.0%	26.8%
Didactic personnel	1.5%	4.7%	15.4%	29.6%	48.8%
Position in university ranking	5.3%	11.9%	28.9%	29.2%	24.8%
Academic campus	6.6%	15.8%	37.6%	26.4%	13.8%
Administrative personnel	8.7%	17.2%	32.5%	26.6%	14.7%

Source: Own materials.

Subsequent research questions were supposed to deepen knowledge about the assessments and expectations of Students with regard to their lecturers and relations established between them in course of the education process. They were asked about the experience from cooperation with a lecturer that they regard as most valuable.

According to Students, the most important experience in cooperation is the received support in personal/professional issues, the second place was occupied by help in scientific issues (Chart 2). The answers given by the respondents confirm hypotheses H2 and H3. Students expect not just knowledge, but above all diverse forms of cooperation. Moreover, the didactic personnel should improve professional support and counselling skills.

Chart 2. Assessment of cooperation between the Student and the Lecturer — most valuable experiences, according to the respondents



Source: Own materials.

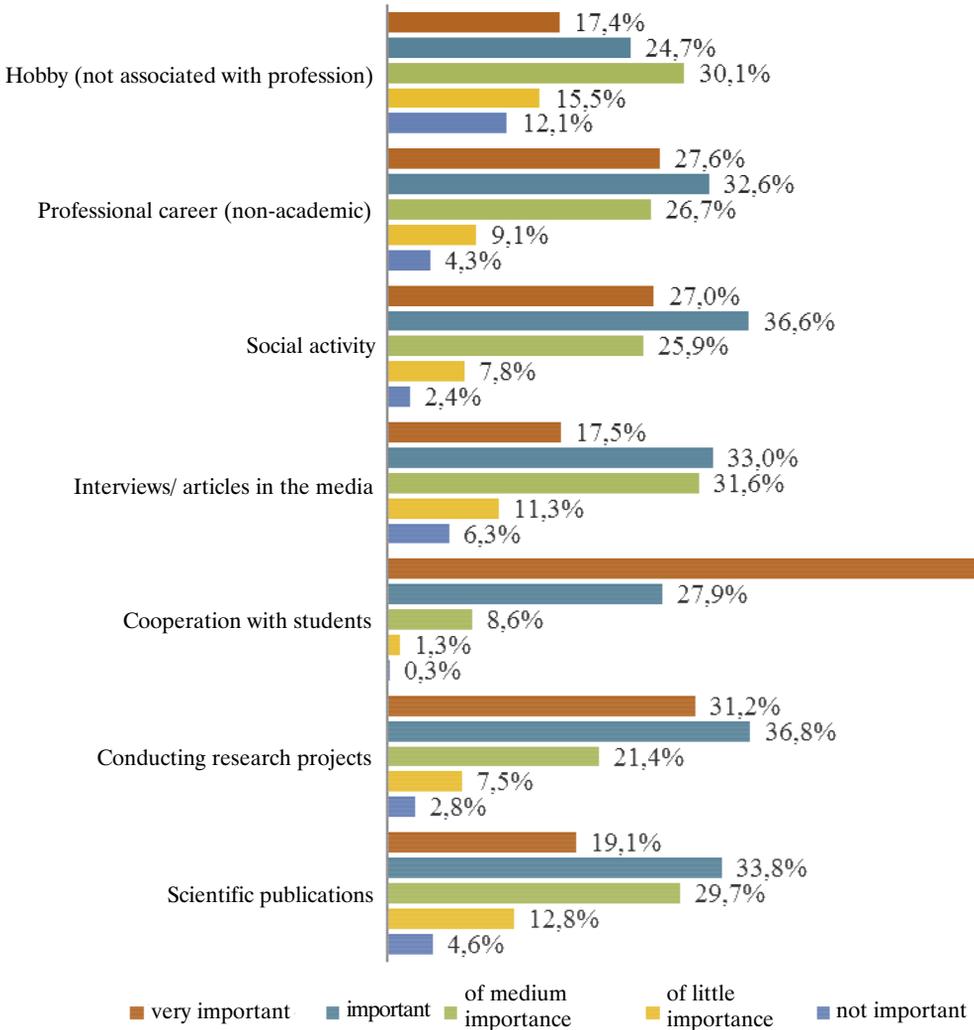
University is the last stage on the path of education and the awareness of the fact that they will start their professional life after graduation encourages students to think about their decisions, as well as about their professional and personal opportunities that their earlier decisions are opening up for them. Students want and feel the need to think about themselves as students in a broader context of academic experience, but also about their future professional role. Through such process they expect the development and growth of their competences, as well as finding their place in the world (HEA, 2011, p. 8). Their goal is achieving success and the awareness of the need for self-development and further education makes them look for mentors in their closest environment. Thus, they expect that the lecturers will assume the role of not just the teacher of a particular subject, but also a mentor supporting the process of formation of the path of professional career and further education.

Professional counselling as a form of support functions at every level of school education. However, university is the final stage on the path of education and for graduates the moment when they enter the labour market often comes during studies, or shortly after graduation. It is the stage at which they start their cycle of professional life and often need professional counselling from people with professional experience who can give them important hints and advice concerning their future profession. The employees who constitute the didactic personnel of a university should, as far as possible, provide professional counsel to the students interested in it. In course of classes they are able to identify certain traits and skills of students and can support their development, or support the elimination of undesirable traits. Engagement in cooperation with students also makes it possible to learn about their social competences. Thanks to such individual approach to the student, it becomes realistic for a university to link a student with a particular, chosen company, according to the need for employees reported by commercial entities. Such a model of linking students with companies during studies would bring tangible benefits also for the image of a university as a socially responsible institution.

In further course of the survey the respondents were asked to name lecturer's activity which has a positive influence on the image of a university. This was supposed to identify the activities of lecturers other than didactic activity and their recognizability among students, which have

an impact on building a positive reception of the didactic personnel, which leads to the formation of a comprehensive image of a university. The results are presented in chart 3.

Chart 3. Non-didactic activities of lecturers and their influence on a university's image



Source: Own materials.

The most highly appreciated activity of lecturers is cooperation with students, as it was recognized as very important by 62.5% of respondents

(it was recognized as important, or very important by a total of over 90% of respondents). The result is an excellent confirmation of hypothesis H2. Students don't expect only knowledge, but above all diverse forms of cooperation.

The second activity recognized as very important (36.8%) is conducting research projects. This was recognized as important, or very important by a total of 68% of the respondents. Students also highly appreciate professional career (non-academic), as 27.6% of respondents recognized it as very important. However, in terms of total assessment (both important and very important) social activity is in the lead with 63.6%, or slightly over 3% of respondents more. In correlation with the issue "What experience do you regard as most valuable in cooperation with a lecturer?", in which the most popular answers were (Chart 2): support in professional/personal issues (36.7%), help in scientific issues (26.5%) and the implementation of a joint project (18.9%); there is a clear trend concerning the expectations of students with regard to the provided educational services.

The quality of education is associated in a significant way with the demeanor, which is a characteristic trait of individuals and has a strong impact on the formation of relations between the student and the mentor. Quality affects opinion, which from the perspective of marketing is a synonym of brand. Respondents in their assessments suggested that they expect a dialogue-based learning (HEA, 2011, p. 4), relying on bilateral communication. They expect education through cooperation, which should be characterized by: partnership, trust, respect, which should also be an incentive for individuals to make an effort to search for knowledge, strengthen skills and develop competences.

## Summary

The presented research results, which constitute only a presentation of a few issues picked from the research, constitute a valuable source of information about the opinions of students concerning: the role and significance of the didactic personnel in the process of creation of

university's image and expectations with regard to the direction of evolution of relations between the student and the lecturer. The obtained knowledge should encourage the academic community and university managers to think about the multi-dimensional influence of the didactic personnel on the creation of a university's image.

Contemporary teaching requires, in light of the expectations of the market, a reconstruction strengthening the role and functions of the teacher (Todoroscu, Popescu-Mitroia, Greculescu, 2015, p. 191). This task can be carried out thanks to the chosen strategy of managing scientific-didactic personnel, but also through the creation of an appropriate atmosphere at work, facilitating, among others, the implementation of forms of education activating creativity. A university which wants to be regarded as innovative, in course of implementation of the didactic process, has to invest in three systems: management of relations with clients/students, managing partnership with internal and external stakeholders, managing internal resources (process capital and infrastructure). Creative atmosphere covers: flows of information, internal communication, distribution of competences and responsibilities, as well as the system of motivation (see: Styś, 2004, 21). Thus, it refers directly to the didactic personnel, which should be encouraged to become active and supported in the implementation of innovative forms of education and assuming the role of a mentor and counsellor. Teachers should think about redesigning their role in the didactic process and should be fully aware of their influence on the perception of their university in the social-economic environment.

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