

THE FACULTIES OF ECONOMIC STUDIES – SUPPLIERS OF SERVICES FOR STUDENTS

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Abstract *This paper approaches the services offered to the students by the faculties of Economic studies. We use the results resulted from an investigation of the students’ perceptions about these faculties. We try to find out the aspects that matter when students evaluate the universities. Based on certain aspects, we also try to compare the services offered by a faculty from a state owned university and its competitors, faculties from the private universities.*

Keywords: Education, Services for Students, Romanian Universities

1. Introduction

In Romania the university education is in full change. Beginning with the 1990’s a reform began that aimed to adapt the Romanian Universities to the new circumstances of a democratic regime and to the market economy. Until now this process objectives were not achieved completely because of many incoherencies. Besides the changes implied by the reform, there are the effects of the Bologna Process that aims the European universities competitiveness increase. Among the objectives it is included a big degree of universities orientation towards the services beneficiaries – the students. In Romania some recommendations were issued regarding the increase of practical knowledge weight in the education process and the facilitation of communication between the students and the teachers. Moreover, when evaluating the teachers some results of questionnaires applied to the students were taken into consideration.

For the Romanian universities, the concentration on the services offered to the students has significant financial reasons. Calling a high number of students represents a priority not only for the private but also for the state universities that receive low financing from the public authorities. In the recent years the important increase of the competition made many universities adapt their offer of services to the students’ requirements.

The services offered by the universities made the object of different approaches. Some of these deal with the Bologna Process implications on the relations between the students and the universities (Capelari, Lucifora; 2008). Others describe the impact of the education reform from Romania on the quality of the services offered by the universities (Marga; 2000).

In this paper we approach the services offered by the Faculties of Economics based on the situation of the one from the University “Dunarea de Jos” Galati. This faculty succeeded in calling many students from Galati County and from the close counties, both for the classical type of education and for the Distance Learning.

However, in the recent years it was felt the more and more intense competition of some faculties from private universities placed in the same area. Many students of the Faculty of Economics from the University “Dunarea de Jos” Galati, especially at Distance Learning, transferred to private universities. The explanations are found not only in the efficient policy of the private universities but in some deficiencies of the services offered by the public faculties. We try to describe the students’ perceptions about the services offered by the faculties based on the results of an investigation we did.

2. Data collection

In order to study the perceptions about the services offered by the universities we used the results of an investigation we realized in the period October 2007 – March 2008. We used a sample of 236 students from the Faculty of Economics – University “Dunarea de Jos” Galati.

In the sample we included students at different specializations and in different years of study (we did not include the students in the first year because we considered they did not have enough time to evaluate the services offered by the university and nor the students from the Moldova Republic because their perceptions are not relevant for this paper).

When composing the sample there were also taken into consideration other aspect of the students' perceptions about the services offered by the universities: type of education (classic or Distance Learning), the existence of the fee-paying places and of the public places, the fact that some students have jobs linked to the profession of economist (for example as accountants, salesmen, cashiers) a.s.o.

The students' perceptions were investigated firstly by group interviews (each group included 8 – 12 persons) and then the students were questioned under the protection of anonymity.

3. Relevant aspects for the offered by the universities services evaluation

In the phase of the group interviews it resulted the students evaluated the services offered by the universities mainly from the perspective of obtaining a job after the graduation. The utility perceived for these services is given by several aspects:

- a) The faculty prestige;
- b) The utility of the knowledge supplied by the education process;
- c) The evaluation exigency;
- d) The receptivity of the teachers for the students requests;
- e) The studies programs administration;
- f) The material endowment of the universities (table 1).

Aspect Degree of importance	Pres- tige	Utility of the know- ledge	Evalu- ation exigency	Receptivi- ty of the teachers	Studies programs adminis- tration	Material endow- ment
Very big importance	119	87	95	92	94	21
Big importance	59	46	41	55	56	71
Medium importance	34	55	83	61	60	122
Little importance	16	29	13	23	21	19
Very little importance	8	19	4	5	5	3
Total	236	236	236	236	236	236

Table 1 - The importance allotted to the relevant aspects for the universities services evaluation

In order to facilitate the comparisons, the degrees of importance associated to the six aspects were transposed on a rating scale from 1 to 5 (1 for very little importance, 5 for very big importance). For all these aspects the values of Standard Deviation, Skewness and Kurtosis indicate a big distance from the normal distribution (table 2).

Indicator \ Factor	Pres- tige	Utility of the know- ledge	Evalua- tion exigency	Receptivi- ty of the teachers	Studies programs adminis- tration	Material endow- ment
Mean	4.12	3.65	3.89	3.87	3.90	3.37
Standard Error	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.05
Median	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00
Mode	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	3.00
Standard Deviation	1.10	1.30	1.06	1.10	1.09	0.81
Sample Variance	1.21	1.70	1.12	1.22	1.19	0.65
Kurtosis	0.54	- 0.85	- 0.81	- 0.66	- 0.57	0.28
Skewness	- 1.17	- 0.54	- 0.41	- 0.57	- 0.61	0.10
Range	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Sum	973.00	861.00	918.00	914.00	921.00	796.00
Count	236.00	236.00	236.00	236.00	236.00	236.00
Largest(1)	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Smallest(1)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Confidence Level (95.0%)	0.14	0.17	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.10

Table 2 - Descriptive statistics for the relevant aspects of the services offered by the universities

a) The faculty prestige For a big part of the students, the graduated university prestige has a big or very big importance from the employment point of view. The investigation of this aspect revealed significant differences between the students with jobs similar to the profession of economist and the other students (table 3).

Degree of importance \ Categories of students	Students with jobs similar to the profession of economist	Other students	Total
Very big importance	17	102	119
Big importance	27	32	59
Medium importance	25	9	34
Little importance	11	5	16
Very little importance	5	3	8
Total	85	151	236

Table 3 - Students' perceptions on the importance of the university prestige

In the sample there were included 85 students with jobs similar to the profession of economist. The investigation revealed they are, in general, less interested than other students in the graduated university

prestige (table 4). The explanation is given by the fact that many of them do not intend to look for another job, but they prefer to consolidate their positions at the present jobs.

Category Indicator	Employed students	Other students
Mean	3.47	4.49
Standard Error	0.12	0.07
Median	4.00	5.00
Mode	4.00	5.00
Standard Deviation	1.13	0.90
Sample Variance	1.28	0.81
Kurtosis	- 0.49	4.21
Skewness	- 0.41	- 2.08
Range	4.00	4.00
Minimum	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00
Sum	295.00	678.00
Count	85.00	151.00
Largest(1)	5.00	5.00
Smallest(1)	1.00	1.00
Confidence Level (95.0 %)	0.24	0.14

Table 4 – Descriptive statistics for the importance of the universities prestige perceived by the students

b) The utility of the knowledge supplied by the education process For more than a half of the students, the utility of the knowledge offered by the education process has a big or very big importance and, in this situation, our investigation revealed significant differences between the students with jobs similar to the profession of economist and the other students (table 5).

Categories of students Degree of importance	Students with jobs similar to the profession of economist	Other students	Total
Very big importance	4	83	87
Big importance	8	38	46
Medium importance	32	23	55
Little importance	24	5	29
Very little importance	17	2	19
Total	85	151	236

Table 5 - Students' perceptions on the utility of the knowledge supplied by th education process

A big number of the students with jobs similar to the profession of economist assign a little or very little importance to the practical knowledge offered by the universities. From the group interviews the results

show that the students consider the experience in their jobs offered enough practical knowledge. The scores obtained by transposing on a rating scale highlight the differences between the two categories of students.

Indicator \ Category	Employed students	Other students
Mean	2.51	4.29
Standard Error	0.12	0.08
Median	3.00	5.00
Mode	3.00	5.00
Standard Deviation	1.06	0.94
Sample Variance	1.13	0.87
Kurtosis	- 0.27	1.09
Skewness	0.32	- 1.26
Range	4.00	4.00
Minimum	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00
Sum	213.00	648.00
Count	85.00	151.00
Largest(1)	5.00	5.00
Smallest(1)	1.00	1.00
Confidence Level(95.0%)	0.23	0.15

Table 6 – Descriptive statistics for the importance of the practical knowledge supplied by the faculties perceived by the students

c) The evaluation exigency A considerable part of the students assign a big or very big importance to the evaluation exigency. In the investigation significant differences were revealed between the students from the classic type of education and from the Distance Learning (table 7).

Degree of importance \ Categories of students	Students from the classical type of education	Students at Distance Learning	Total
Very big importance	24	71	95
Big importance	29	12	41
Medium importance	74	9	83
Little importance	11	2	13
Very little importance	4	-	4
Total	142	94	236

Table 7 - Students' perceptions on the evaluation exigency

From the 236 investigated students 94 are from the Distance Learning (DL). In general, they assign a big importance to the evaluation exigency meaning they would prefer passing the exams very easily. They explained they did not have enough time to learn (89 had a job) and they were disadvantaged in comparison with the students from the classical type of education who could obtain more information from the teachers. Anyhow, they do not necessarily want big marks but they are pleased with passing the exams. For the students at the classical type of education the number of those assigning a big or very big importance to the evaluation exigency is much smaller in comparison with the one of the students at DL. The students from the first category want not only to pass the exams but also to obtain big marks about which they consider useful for getting scholarships and attractive jobs after the graduation. The scores obtained after transposing the degree of importance in a rating scale reflect the significant differences between the two categories of students (table 8).

Category		
Indicator	Classical type of education	Distance Learning
Mean	3.41	4.62
Standard Error	0.08	0.08
Median	3.00	5.00
Mode	3.00	5.00
Standard Deviation	0.95	0.75
Sample Variance	0.91	0.56
Kurtosis	- 0.05	2.67
Skewness	0.09	- 1.90
Range	4.00	3.00
Minimum	1.00	2.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00
Sum	484.00	434.00
Count	142.00	94.00
Largest (1)	5.00	5.00
Smallest (1)	1.00	2.00
Confidence Level (95.0 %)	0.16	0.15

Table 8 – Descriptive statistics for the importance of the evaluation exigency

d) The receptivity of the teachers for the students requests A significant part of the students assign a big or very big importance to the receptivity of the teachers for the students' requests. The investigation of this aspect revealed considerable differences between the students who pay fees and the students with the education financed from public funds (table 9).

Degree of importance	Categories of students	Students on fee – paying places	Students on public places	Total
Very big importance		84	8	92
Big importance		38	17	55
Medium importance		18	43	61

Little importance	8	15	23
Very little importance	3	2	5
Total	151	85	236

Table 9 - Students' perceptions on the receptivity of the teachers for the students requests

From the 236 investigated students 151 are fee – payers. In general, they assign a much more importance to the receptivity of the teachers for their requests (concerning especially the accessibility of the courses and the orientation towards the knowledge they may use in the future jobs) in comparison with the students on public places. This situation was confirmed by transposing the degrees of importance on a rating scale (table 10).

Indicator \ Category	Fee - payers	Public places
Mean	4.27	3.16
Standard Error	0.08	0.10
Median	5.00	3.00
Mode	5.00	3.00
Standard Deviation	1.00	0.91
Sample Variance	1.00	0.83
Kurtosis	1.30	0.06
Skewness	- 1.38	0.24
Range	4.00	4.00
Minimum	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00
Sum	645.00	269.00
Count	151.00	85.00
Largest(1)	5.00	5.00
Smallest(1)	1.00	1.00
Confidence Level (95.0%)	0.16	0.20

Table 10 – Descriptive statistics for the importance of the receptivity of teachers

e) The studies programs administration An important part of the investigated students assign a big and very big importance to the studies programs administration. Our investigation revealed this time also significant differences between the fee – payers students and the students on public places (table 11).

Degree of importance \ Categories of students	Students on fee – paying places	Students on public places	Total
Very big importance	88	6	94

Big importance	35	21	56
Medium importance	19	41	60
Little importance	7	14	21
Very little importance	2	3	5
Total	151	85	236

Table 11 - Students' perceptions on the studies programs administration

In general, the fee – payers students are more interested in the studies programs administration than the students with public places. This situation is highlight by the descriptive statistics obtained by transposing the degrees of importance on a rating scale (table 12).

Indicator \ Category	Fee - payers	Public places
Mean	4.32	3.15
Standard Error	0.08	0.10
Median	5.00	3.00
Mode	5.00	3.00
Standard Deviation	0.96	0.91
Sample Variance	0.91	0.82
Kurtosis	1.31	0.11
Skewness	- 1.39	- 0.02
Range	4.00	4.00
Minimum	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00
Sum	653.00	268.00
Count	151.00	85.00
Largest(1)	5.00	5.00
Smallest(1)	1.00	1.00
Confidence Level (95.0%)	0.15	0.20

Table 12 – Descriptive statistics for the importance of the studies programs administration

f) The material endowment of the universities More than half from the investigated students assign a medium importance to the material endowment. Significant differences between the fee – payers students and the students on public places were revealed (table 13).

Degree of importance \ Categories of students	Students on fee – paying places	Students on public places	Total
Very big importance	19	2	21

Big importance	59	12	71
Medium importance	56	66	122
Little importance	15	4	19
Very little importance	2	1	3
Total	151	85	236

Table 13 - Students' perceptions on the material endowment

On the whole, the fee – payers students assign a bigger importance to the material endowment of the faculty in comparison with the students on public places. This situation is confirmed by the descriptive statistics resulted by transposing the degrees of importance on a rating scale (table 14).

Category		
Indicator	Fee payers	Public places
Mean	3.52	3.12
Standard Error	0.07	0.06
Median	4.00	3.00
Mode	4.00	3.00
Standard Deviation	0.89	0.57
Sample Variance	0.78	0.32
Kurtosis	- 0.14	4.26
Skewness	- 0.23	0.43
Range	4.00	4.00
Minimum	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00
Sum	531.00	265.00
Count	151.00	85.00
Largest (1)	5.00	5.00
Smallest (1)	1.00	1.00
Confidence Level (95.0%)	0.14	0.12

Table 14 – Descriptive statistics for the importance of the material endowment

4. Comparison between the services offered by the faculties

The services offered by the Faculty of Economics from the University “Dunarea de Jos” Galati were compared with those offered by the main competitors - faculties from private universities in Galati and in the close counties. For the beginning the students were asked to evaluate the services offered by the public faculties, taking into account six considered relevant aspects (table 15).

Aspect Mark	Pres- tige	Utility of the know- ledge	Evalua- tion exigency	Receptivi- ty of the teachers	Studies programs adminis- tration	Material endow- ment
Very Big	12	4	84	5	-	7
Big	168	41	102	23	11	16
Moderate	48	94	31	46	37	61
Little	6	59	12	69	86	119
Very Little	2	38	7	93	102	33
Total	236	236	236	236	236	236

Table 15 – Students evaluations of the services offered by the FE from U "DJ" Galati

More than three quarters from the questioned students evaluate the prestige of the Faculty of Economics from the University "Dunarea de Jos" as being big or very big. This perception is given by the fact it is one from the oldest existent in the country. More than 40 % from the students evaluated the utility of the knowledge offered by the faculty as being little or very little. Most of them have jobs linked to the profession of economist and they consider some knowledge offered in the faculty would not be brought up to date. More than three quarters from the students thought that evaluation exigency was big or very big. However, most of the respondents noticed that the exigency decreased because of the teachers' evaluation by the students. More than half of the investigated students evaluated the receptivity at the students' requests as being little or very little. Most of the respondents consider that teachers' evaluation by the students did not bring a plus in this field.

The studies programs administration received the most unfavorable evaluations from the questioned students. In the group interviews they complained about some problems: they did not choose the optional matters, the delay in supplying the course for the students at D L a.s.o. More than half from the questioned students evaluated unfavorably the material endowment of the faculty. However, some of them said in the recent period there are changes in this problem. In order to facilitate the comparisons, the marks offered by the students were transposed on a rating scale from 1 to 5 (1 for very little and 5 for very big) (table 16).

Indicator Aspect	Pres- tige	Utility of the know- ledge	Evalua- tion exigency	Receptivi- ty of the teachers	Studies programs adminis- tration	Material endow- ment
Mean	3.77	2.64	4.03	2.06	1.82	2.34
Standard Error	0.04	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.06
Median	4.00	3.00	4.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
Mode	4.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	1.00	2.00
Standard Deviation	0.62	1.00	0.98	1.08	0.86	0.91
Sample Variance	0.38	1.01	0.96	1.17	0.75	0.82
Kurtosis	3.62	- 0.67	1.25	- 0.32	- 0.15	0.77
Skewness	- 1.34	- 0.08	- 1.16	0.76	0.80	0.79
Range	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00

Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00
Sum	890.00	622.00	952.00	486.00	429.00	553.00
Count	236.00	236.00	236.00	236.00	236.00	236.00
Largest(1)	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00
Smallest(1)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Confidence Level (95.0%)		0.13	0.13	0.14	0.11	0.12

Table 16 – Descriptive statistics of the students perceptions about the services offered by the Faculty of Economics from the University “Dunarea de Jos” Galati

The 236 students were invited to evaluate, with respect for the six relevant aspects, the faculties of economics from the private universities considered as the main competitors for the Faculty of Economics from the University “Dunarea de Jos” Galati. However, in this comparison it must be taken into consideration the fact that for some aspects the students are not enough informed for being able to express their opinions (table 17).

Aspect Mark	Pres- tige	Utility of the know- ledge	Evalua- tion exigency	Receptivi- ty of the teachers	Studies programs adminis- tration	Material endow- ment
Very big	-	5	-	8	108	64
Big	6	38	4	39	84	146
Moderate	61	87	42	55	41	24
Little	121	47	137	60	3	2
Very little	48	31	53	42	-	-
No answer	-	28	-	32	-	-
Total	236	236	236	236	236	236

Table 17 - Students’ perceptions about the services offered by the rival faculties

It is obvious the students consider the studies programs administration and material endowment from the private universities better than the same aspects at the public universities. On the other side, they think the prestige of the public universities is much bigger than the one of the private universities and the evaluation is more severe in the first case.

Aspect Indicator	Pres- tige	Utility of the know- ledge	Evalua- tion exigency	Receptivi- ty of the teachers	Studies programs adminis- tration	Material endow- ment
Mean	2.11	2.71	1.99	2.56	4.26	4.15

Standard Error	0.05	0.07	0.04	0.08	0.05	0.04
Median	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.50	4.00	4.00
Mode	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	5.00	4.00
Standard Deviation	0.74	1.01	0.69	1.13	0.79	0.62
Sample Variance	0.55	1.02	0.47	1.28	0.62	0.39
Kurtosis	- 0.37	- 0.56	0.10	- 0.86	- 0.59	0.45
Skewness	0.20	- 0.12	0.33	0.22	- 0.65	- 0.33
Range	3.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.00
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00
Maximum	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Sum	497.00	563.00	469.00	523.00	1,005.00	980.00
Count	236.00	208.00	236.00	204.00	236.00	236.00
Largest (1)	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Smallest (1)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00
Confidence Level (95.0 %)	0.10	0.14	0.09	0.16	0.10	0.08

Table 18 – Descriptive statistics of the students’ perceptions about the services offered by the private universities

In order to facilitate the comparisons, the marks offered by the students were transposed on a rating scale (table 18). Anyhow, the comparison based on the descriptive statistics is affected by the fact that quite many students did not express their opinions regarding certain aspects.

5. Conclusions

In this paper we approached the services offered by the universities. As an illustration, we used the situation of the Faculty of Economics from the University “Dunarea de Jos” Galati. We analyzed the students’ perceptions about these services using the results of an investigation applied to 236 students. We found out six relevant aspects: the faculty prestige;

the utility of the knowledge supplied by the education process; the evaluation exigency; the receptivity of the teachers for the students requests; the studies programs administration; the material endowment of the universities. With respect to these aspects we presented the students’ perceptions about the services offered by the Faculty of Economics from the University “Dunarea de Jos” Galati and by other rival faculties from private universities.

It results that students assign a superior prestige to the state owned (public) universities and they consider these universities evaluate more severely the students in comparison with the private universities. On the other side, the private universities are superior in the fields of studies programs administration and of the material endowment.

These perceptions may be linked with the competition increase between the Faculty of Economics from the University “Dunarea de Jos” Galati and the faculties from some private universities. The fact that in the recent years quite many students, especially at the Distance Learning, transferred at private universities may be the effect of the favorable perceptions for the studies programs administration, for the material endowment and also the effect of a lower exigency in the students’ evaluation. On the other side, the fact

that some students prefer to remain at the Faculty of Economics from the University “Dunarea de Jos” Galati may be the special of the superior prestige.

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