Cvetko, Sandra [1]

Hunjet, Anica [2]

Kozina, Goran [3]

Improvement of the Activities of Student Services at University North, University Center Varaždin

Abstract:

An organization is a group of people who enable the achievement of a common goal using their own efforts. Organizing is a process which has two specific parts: the structure of a company and coordination of human resources. They are both very important and almost indispensable in business economics and the modern business world. Therefore, in the context of this definition, University North is seen as an organizational unit with all its features, i.e. advantages and problems. An organization (manufacturing or service) cannot be imagined and cannot operate or survive in the market unless proper, timely and quality selection of the organizational structure together with its maintenance and improvement are taken into account. Having that in mind, certain problems have been noticed in the organization of University North which hamper its effectiveness. Student services, as one of the organizational units, contribute to its work and it is very important for the total satisfaction of the most

work in student services and previous knowledge, it has been noticed that the effectiveness of tasks carried out by the student services is not at the expected and required level, i.e. it is possible to increase their efficiency to a higher level by reorganization and certain improvements. The efficiency and effectiveness of student services is determined by the satisfaction of students and all other stakeholders - teachers, workers, graduates, employers, associates, and others. The paper presents an analysis and research of a better organization with the purpose of improving the organization and efficiency of the Student Services at University North. Upon recognizing and defining the problems for this research, the data have been collected in order to get an insight into the current situation, which is generally defined by the hypotheses. Using surveys, this research examines the students' satisfaction / dissatisfaction regarding the services provided by the Student Services on a daily basis.

Author´s data:

[1] Sandra, Cvetko, mag. oec., Sveučilište Sjever, 104. Brigade 3, Varaždin, sandra.cvetko@unin.hr;

[2] Anica, Hunjet, izv. prof. dr. sc., Sveučilište Sjever, 104. Brigade 3, Varaždin, anica.hunjet@unin.hr;

[3] Goran, Kozina, izv. prof. dr. sc., Sveučilište Sjever, 104. Brigade 3, Varaždin, goran.kozina@unin.hr

VALLIS AUREA

Introduction

Organisation is a process that involves two specific components: the structure of a company and the coordination of human resources. Both are very important and almost indispensable in business economics and today's business world [1]. In the context of this definition, the University North can be viewed as an organizational unit with specific characteristics. An organization cannot exist, do business or survive in the market unless due care and attention is given to the timely selection of adequate and quality organizational structure, its maintenance and continuous development. Various organisational problems have been observed at the University North that hinder its effective operation. Student Services, as an organizational unit of the University, is a factor in the operation of the University and affects the satisfaction of the most important stakeholders, i.e. students.

Moreover, it has been observed that, in terms of effectiveness in performing its activities, the Student Services does not meet the expected and required quality levels. Restructuring efforts are needed to enhance its efficiency. Student Services is the place of first contact of students with the new education system. It is a place at which the journey of an academic citizen begins. Students receive information from the Student Services almost on a daily basis, either in a direct contact with the staff or via e-mail and website. They can get answers to all of their questions, as well as any other information concerning timetables, exams, entry of grades, complaints and all other aspects of study. It is important that the Student Services staff is efficient and effective in providing services to students and any other interested party.

Research hypotheses and research goal

The following null and auxiliary hypotheses are proposed in this paper:

H0 - Reorganisation of the Student Services at the University North is necessary to increase the level of its effectiveness and efficiency.

H1 - Reorganization of the Student Services at the University North would increase the satisfaction of students, teachers, and all other interested parties.

The primary goal of this research is to confirm or reject the main and auxiliary hypotheses. In case the null hypothesis is confirmed, the following objectives will be set:
• determine whether the Student Services are well organized;
• determine whether Student Services office hours are adjusted to accommodate the needs of students, teachers and external associates, i.e. all end users;
• determine whether the Student Services staff is helpful to students, teachers, i.e. all end users;
• determine whether there is a need for additional training of the Student Services staff;
• set out the guidelines for training;
• set out the guidelines for the improvement of the quality in Student Services,
• consider the possibility for adjustments, in terms of physical office environment, to accommodate student needs;
• develop proposals for improvement of the organization of the Student Services;
• identify the most important factors that affect its efficiency;
• identify key resources required for effective operation;
• identify structure and organization (of people, space, time, finances, etc.) that would improve the effectiveness of the Student Services.

Research methods

Descriptive methods are used in the theory section of the paper. This section of the paper provides a literature review. In the empirical section of the paper, various quantitative techniques and methods were used, such as sampling, analysis, synthesis, as well as survey, as briefly described later in the text.

Sampling

According to Petz, a sample is a limited number of members of a particular population (a subset) that will be investigated. A sample is selected from a population making sure that the selected group accurately represents the population from which it was selected. Such a sample is called an impartial or a representative sample. If this has not been achieved, the sample is biased (not representative of the population as a whole) [2]. A method of purposive sampling, i.e. quota sampling, was used in this research. A quota sample is a purposive sample. Using his/her knowledge of the population with regard to the subject of research, the researcher creates a sample by preselecting the elements from each stratum. Sample size depends mainly on the variability of the measured characteristic, as well as the precision with which one wants to measure a particular characteristic.

Analysis and synthesis

Depending on the scientific field in which they are used, analyses fall into one of the following categories: economic, historical, mathematical, engineering, and the like. In contrast to analysis, a scientific research method that combines parts or elements into a single or unified entity, or combines simple concepts into complex ones and complex ones into even more complex ones is called synthesis [3].

Survey

A survey is a specially prepared document for the purpose of collecting information and respondents' opinions about a specific problem. It is used as a cost-effective alternative to other techniques when there is a spatial gap between the respondents. This method is less time-consuming than interviews. A survey can be successfully used to solve relationship problems with customers and suppliers, as well as in cases when it is necessary to collect the opinions of a large number of people. Despite the weaknesses and shortcomings of this method, a well prepared and conducted survey can benefit an organization. It is important to carefully consider and formulate the questions, select an adequate method of conducting the survey, choose well the customers, the method of presenting the results, as well as preventive and corrective actions.

The disadvantages of the survey are:
• generalized questions cause the respondents to have an impression that the survey is not suited to their scope of activities or relevant to them;
• often, the answers are given in groups and do not reflect the opinion of an individual;
• surveys are not well-received because respondents have the impression that changes will be made to their workplace that could put their livelihoods at risk and therefore they tend to embellish the facts;
• it is not possible to put additional questions;
• sometimes the person responsible gives the questionnaire to his/her associates, which compromises the results of the survey;
• sometimes respondents become annoyed with and give answers without paying attention;
• due to poor preparation of questions and poor instructions on how to fill in the

7

VALLIS AUREA

questionnaire some survey fail to fulfil their purpose.

The main advantages of the survey are:
•   information about the problem is received in writing,
•   the results are obtained in a short amount of time,
•   the cost of implementation is negligible,
•   data processing is easy [4].

Based on the above, a questionnaire was prepared for the purpose of evaluating student satisfaction with the Student Services. The first section of both the questionnaire for evaluation of student satisfaction with the Student Services and the questionnaire for evaluation of teacher satisfaction with the Student Services elicits information about the respondents, while the second section of the questionnaires addresses specific issues relating to the purpose of the survey.

The surveys employed open-ended questions (respondents are asked to volunteer answers using their own words and write down all the details) as well as closed questions (the most common answers from which respondents were required to choose were YES and NO. These types of questions were usually followed by: "If you have answered YES, please explain why" or "If you have answered NO, please explain why").

University North Student Services

The aim of this chapter is to briefly describe the position and role of working procedures of the Student Services within the University North operations. The chapter describes the current situation in the Student Services as determined by an analysis of its activities.

Basic structure of the Student Services

The University North delivers university and professional study programmes at two University Centres located in Koprivnica and Varaždin [5]. As shown in Figure 1, Student Services is made up of three organizational units:
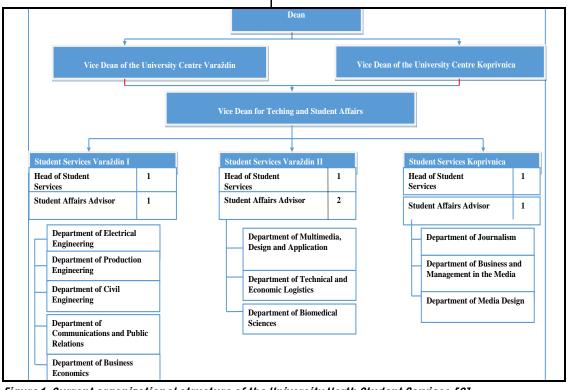

Figure 1. Current organizational structure of the University North Student Services [6]

VALLIS AUREA

International Journal - VALLIS AUREA • Volume 2 • Number 1 • Croatia, June 2016
UDK 378.4-057.875; DOI 10.2507/IJVA.2.1.1.23

Short description of activities performed by the Student Services

The main activities of the Student Services are defined in the following regulatory acts:
• Statute
• Regulations on Studying
• Quality procedure of the Student Services QP - 07 - 04.

The main activities of the Student Services include the following [7]:
• processing of applications and enrolment of students in the first year of study;
• enrolment of students transferring from other higher education institutions;
• enrolment of students in the next year of study;
• verification of a semester;
• exam-related administration;
• creation and maintenance of records;
• graduation-related activities;
• coordination of degree award ceremony activities.

Research and analysis of the current situation

With a view to improving the work of the Student Services at the University North, measures should be proposed in the framework of this research to ensure a better flow of information between the students, teachers, and external associates, on the one hand, and the staff of the Student Services of the University North, on the other, and create adequate working conditions. A survey was conducted to gather feedback about the satisfaction/dissatisfaction of students who regularly use the services of the Student Services.

The survey seeks to examine the satisfaction/dissatisfaction of students, teachers, external associates, as well as the Student Services staff at the University North. In other words, its aim is to identify, based on the results of research, the activities of the Student Services whose quality should be improved or which should be adjusted to meet the requirements of all interested parties. Furthermore, the aim is to obtain information which could serve as the basis for creating potential improvement measures with a view to increasing the satisfaction of all interested parties thus improving the quality and efficiency of the support provided by the Student Services. The research was conducted to draw attention to the problems in the organization of the Student Services and the need for its reorganization.

Do students enrolled at the University North find that Student Services staff provide quality services and are available to them?
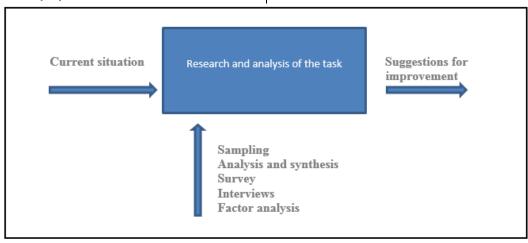
9

Figure 2. Flow chart of the research process [8]

International Journal - VALLIS AUREA • Volume 2 • Number 1 • Croatia, June 2016
UDK 378.4-057.875; DOI 10.2507/IJVA.2.1.1.23

VALLIS AUREA

Analysis of student survey

571 students enrolled at the University North - University Centre Varaždin participated in the survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Prior to filling in the questionnaire, students were verbally informed about the research. The survey was conducted using a Questionnaire for evaluation of student satisfaction with the Student Services (hereinafter referred to as the questionnaire). The overall response rate was satisfactory (above 90%), resulting in the research sample of 571 respondents.

Survey results

A semi-structured questionnaire consisting of four sections was used to collect data. The first section of the questionnaire focuses on general information about the students, as shown in Table 1.

		N	%
Which study programme are you attending?	Electrical Engineering	73	12.78%
	Multimedia, Design and Application	99	17.34%
	Production Engineering	80	14.01%
	Civil Engineering	113	19.79%
	Technical and Economic Logistics	97	16.99%
	Biomedical Sciences	109	19.09%
What is your year of study?	first year	222	38.88%
	second year	170	29.77%
	third year	179	31.35%
Specify your mode of study.	full-time	262	45.88%
	part-time	309	54.12%
Are you currently employed?	no	378	66.20%
	Yes, full-time.	96	16.81%
	Yes, part-time.	97	16.99%

Table 1. General study-related information about the respondents [9]

Students answered questions about the study programme they are attending, their year of study, mode of study, and employment status by choosing one of the offered answers.

1. Which study programme are you attending?

The survey included students enrolled in six undergraduate professional study programmes at the University Centre Varaždin. 73 (12.78%) respondents study Electrical Engineering, 99 (17.34%) study Multimedia, Design and Application, 80 (14.01%) study Production Engineering, 113 (19.79%) study Civil Engineering, 97 (16.99%) study Technical and Economic Logistics, and 109 (19.09%) study Biomedical Sciences (Figure 3).
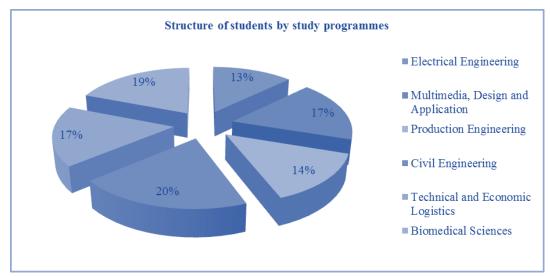
Figure 3. Structure of students by study programmes [8]

2. What is your year of study?

The survey included students from all study years. 222 (38.88%) respondents were first-year students, 170 (29.77%) respondents were second-year students, and 179 (31.35%) and were third-year students (Figure 4).
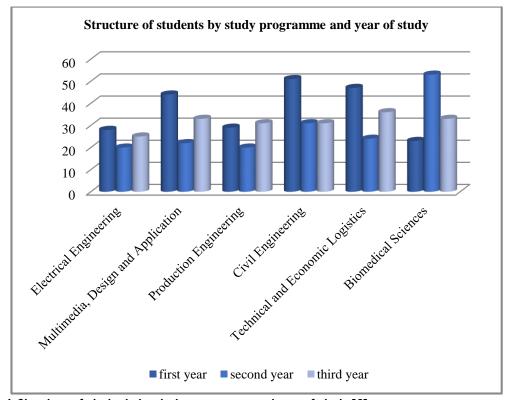

Figure 4. Structure of students by study programme and year of study [8]

The aim of this section of the questionnaire was to gain information as to how students usually contacted the Student Services; the frequency of their visits to the Student Services; the reasons for their visits; and which Student Services office hours they would prefer (Table 2).

11

VALLIS AUREA

How do you usually contact the Student Services?	by coming to the office	430	75.30%
	by e-mail	85	14.89%
	by phone	21	3.68%
	a combination of the above	35	6.13%
How long do you usually wait for a response to your enquiry sent to the Student Services by e-mail?	one day	271	47.46%
	three to five days	169	29.60%
	there have been instances when the Student Services have not replied to my e-mail	85	14.89%
	no answer	46	8.05%
How often do you come to the Student Services office?	once a week	30	5.25%
	several times a week	8	1.40%
	once a month	529	92.65%
	no answer	4	0.70%
What is the most common reason for coming to the Student Services office?	to write an application	127	22.24%
	to pay tuition fees	211	36.95%
	write down a reason	200	35.03%
	no answer	33	5.78%
How long do you usually stay in the Student Services office?	up to 5 minutes	378	66.20%
	5 - 15 minutes	158	27.67%
	more than 15 minutes	32	5.60%
	no answer	3	0.53%
Which of these working hours do you find the most convenient?	09:00 to 13:00	57	9.98%
	12:00 to 16:00	160	28.02%
	13:00 to 17:00	170	29.77%
	16:00 to 20:00	96	16.81%
	write down working hours		
	the whole day	37	6.48%
	in the morning (until 16:00)	19	3.33%
	in the afternoon (until 20:00)	21	3.68%
	no answer	11	1.93%

Table 2. General data on contacts with the Student Services [9]

3. How do you usually contact the Student Services?

The second section of the questionnaire focuses on the satisfaction of students with their communication with the Student Services. Students were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction on a 3-point Likert scale by choosing one of the following: extremely satisfied, very satisfied and satisfied. If they reported they were not satisfied with the communication, they were asked to describe their complaints.

4. Are you satisfied with the communication with the Student Services?

VALLIS AUREA

International Journal - VALLIS AUREA • Volume 2 • Number 1 • Croatia, June 2016
UDK 378.4-057.875; DOI 10.2507/IJVA.2.1.1.23

As shown in Figure 5, 199 (34.85%) students who reported that they were not satisfied with the communication with the Student Services cited one of the following reasons: staff were not answering the phone, staff were not responding to their e-mails; long waiting periods for the issuance of indexes (student log-books), slowness in solving problems (Figure 5).

Are students satisfied with the communication with the Student Services?
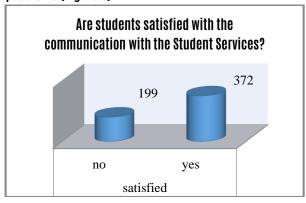

Figure 5. Level of student satisfaction with the communication with the Student Services [8]

If you have answered YES, please rate your satisfaction

Of 372 (65.15%) students who reported they were satisfied with the communication with the Student Services, 255 (68.55%) chose satisfied, 91 (24.46%) students chose very satisfied, and 26 (6.99%) students chose extremely satisfied (Figure 6).
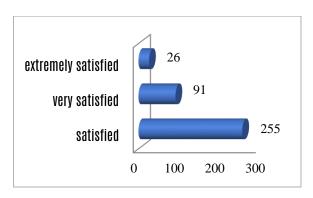

Figure 6. Level of student satisfaction with the Student Services [8]

5. Have you ever had any complaints about the services delivered by the Student Services?
When asked whether they had any complaints about the services of the Student Services, 433 (75.83%)

students answered NO, 2 (0.35%) students did not answer the question, while 136 (23.82%) students reported that they did have complaints about the services (Figure 7).

Have students had any complaints about the services provided by the Student Services staff?

Figure 7. Student complaints about the services of the Student Services [8]

Here too, the most frequent complaints were about the staff not answering the phone and not responding to e-mails; long waiting periods for the issuance of indexes; expensive application fees; expensive transcript fees; and office hours.

The purpose of the third section of the questionnaire was to assess student satisfaction with the work of the Student Services staff on the following five items:
•	(Item no. 6) Student Services staff's friendliness towards students
•	(Item no. 7) Student Services staff competence
•	(Item no. 8) Satisfaction with the feedback received from the Student Services staff to study-related enquiries
•	(Item no. 9) Satisfaction with the promptness in dealing with student applications
•	(Item no. 10) Satisfaction with the Student Services physical office environment
A Five-point Likert scale was used to measure the level of satisfaction: 1 - very dissatisfied, 2 - dissatisfied, 3 - neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4 - satisfied, 5 - very satisfied.
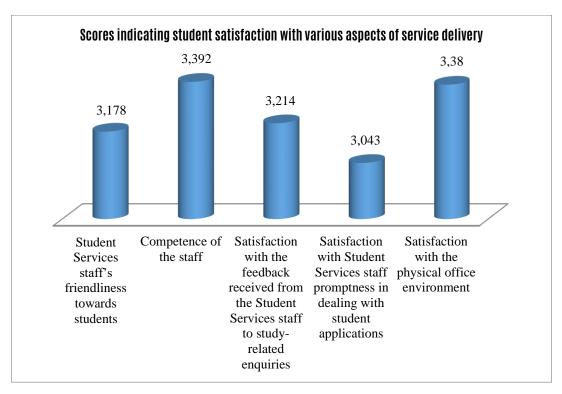
13

VALLIS AUREA

Scores indicating student satisfaction with various aspects of service delivery

3,178 — Student Services staff's friendliness towards students
3,392 — Competence of the staff
3,214 — Satisfaction with the feedback received from the Student Services staff to study-related enquiries
3,043 — Satisfaction with Student Services staff promptness in dealing with student applications
3,38 — Satisfaction with the physical office environment

Figure 8. Student satisfaction with the Student Services [8]

Staff competence attracted the highest scores (3,392), second-highest scores were given to the satisfaction with the physical office environment (3.380), followed by the satisfaction with the feedback received from the Student Services staff to study-related enquiries (3.214), and the Student Services staff's friendliness towards students (3.178), whereas the satisfaction with the Student Services staff promptness in dealing with student applications was given the lowest scores (3.043) (Figure 8).

The fourth section of the questionnaire focused on students' opinions and attitudes about the good and the bad examples in the work of the Student Services. This section of the questionnaire asked students to give their suggestions as to how to improve the work, as well as the quality and efficiency of services provided by the Student Services.

11. Which experiences involving the services of the Student Services staff would you highlight as POSITIVE?

199 students (34.85%) expressed a positive opinion of the Student Services staff describing them as competent, friendly and helpful.

12. Which experiences involving the work of the Student Services staff would you highlight as NEGATIVE?

228 students (39.93%) complained about having to wait for a long time for the issuance of indexes and expressed their dissatisfaction with the Student Services office hours, small office space, and staff not answering the phone and responding to their e-mails.

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

571 students enrolled in the University North - University Centre Varaždin were surveyed. Prior to taking part in the survey, students were verbally informed about its purpose. Participation was anonymous. The survey was conducted using a Questionnaire for evaluation of student satisfaction with the Student Services.

14

Student survey results show that 75.30% of the students contact the Student Services staff by coming to the office. The data obtained from the survey contain student preferences with regard to office hours of the Student Services. The respondents were offered four four-hour-long office hours to choose from. The majority (29.77%) of students reported that office hours from 13:00 to 17:00 would be the most convenient for them. 26.97% of the students preferred afternoon office hours (17:00 to 20:00).

The data obtained from the survey indicate that 34.85% of the respondents highlighted as positive the staff's competence, friendliness and helpfulness. As negative, 39.93% of the students highlighted the fact that the staff were overloaded with work. In their opinion the ratio of students to the Student Services staff is inadequate, as is the space. In addition, they find the organization of work to be poor and sometimes they feel that the staff do not have all the information.

The data obtained from the survey, once reviewed and analysed, corroborated both null and the auxiliary hypothesis. In other words, the statement that a reorganisation of the Student Services is necessary to increase its efficiency and effectiveness in order for students and other interested parties to be satisfied with the work of the Student Services is justified.

The possible changes to the organisation of the Student Services could involve:
- changes to the organisation of office space;
- changes involving human resources;
- regulatory changes; and
- a combination of the above.

To successfully implement organisational changes, it is necessary to create an environment which will facilitate them, as shown in Figure 9.
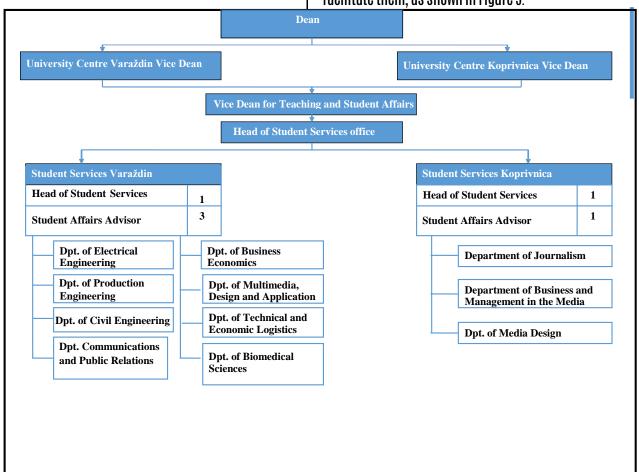

Figure 9. Proposed structure of the Student Services at the University North [6]

15

VALLIS AUREA

Conclusion

The efficiency and effectiveness of the Student Services is determined by the satisfaction of students as well as all other interested parties, i.e. teachers, administrative staff, former students, employers, external associates, etc. The survey shows that the level of student satisfaction with the Student Services varies and that there are certain organisational problems. This confirms the main hypothesis which states that a reorganization of the Student Services at the University North is necessary to increase the level of its effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the auxiliary hypothesis relating to the increase of the level of satisfaction of students and other interested parties. The following have been identified as possible solutions and opportunities for improvement of efficiency and effectiveness of the Student Service:

- reorganization of the Student Services office space

The Student Services should have two separate offices. One would be used for daily interactions with students, teachers, etc., while all other activities would be performed in the other office.

- changing of the Student Services office hours

To improve the availability of its services, two days a week, the Student Services office should be open for students and other interested parties also in the afternoon.

- monitoring the efficiency of the work of the Student Services

Further surveys can be conducted to monitor the quality of the work of the Student Services. There is a need to rate the performance of individual employees. To be able to do that, it is necessary to set standards, develop the rating criteria as well as incentive schemes and successful employee reward programs.

- visiting other higher education institutions

It is recommended to visit other universities, both in Croatia and abroad, in order to exchange experiences with their staff and see firsthand how other HE institutions have organised their activities. It is necessary to reorganize the Student Services to improve its effectiveness. The proposed changes as to the office space would allow for the specialization of activities and would facilitate staff efficiency.

Each individual activity should be standardized to ensure consistent execution of activities. Two days a week, the Student Services office should also be open in the afternoon to facilitate greater access to its services. Further research on this issue is needed to identify the impact of individual factors and examine a possible synergistic effect of factors on the effectiveness and efficiency of the work of the Student Services. The Deming cycle can be applied to the activities of the Student Services to ensure that all activities are planned (plan), implemented (do), monitored (check) and improved (act).

16

References

[1] Sikavica, P. (2011). Organizacija, Školska knjiga, Zagreb, ISBN 978-953-0-30395-9

[2] Petz, B. (1985). Osnovne statističke metode za nematematičare, Sveučilišna naklada Liber, Zagreb,

[3] Veleučilište u Rijeci, Dostupno na: http://www.veleri.hr/files/datoteke/nastavni_mat erijali/k_informatika_s2/Znanstvene%20metode.p df Pristup: 31-03-2014

[4] Žugaj, M., Dumičić K., Dušak, V. (1999). Temelji znanstvenoistraživačkog rada, Metodologija i metodika, Fakultet organizacije i informatike, Varaždin, ISBN 953-6071–15-0

[5] Statut Sveučilišta Sjever, Koprivnica, prosinac 2014.

[6] Cvetko, S.; Hunjet, A.; Kondić, Ž. (2015). Improvement of the structure and efficacy on the example of University Norths student office, University center Varaždin, Tehnički glasnik, Technical Journal, Znanstveno-stručni časopis Sveučilišta Sjever, Scientific professional journal of University North. 9, 4; 469-476, ISSN 1846-6168 (Print), ISSN 1848-5588 (Online)

[7] Procesi rada u studentskoj službi, Sveučilište Sjever, veljača, 2014.

[8] Cvetko, S. (2015). Diplomski rad, Istraživanje efikasnosti studentske službe Sveučilišta Sjever, Sveučilišnog centra Varaždin, Sveučilište Sjever, KC/VZ

[9] Cvetko S.; Hunjet, A.; Kozina, G. (2015) The research on efficiency of the student service in the case of University North, University Center Varaždin, EDASOL 2015, V INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE on economic development and standard of living, Banja Luka, BIH, 315-336, ISSN 2232-8823

17

VALLIS AUREA