

## EXPECTATIONS OF NAZARBAYEV UNIVERSITY GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

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**Introduction.** The importance of employability skills has been discussed in Kazakhstan in one form or another. An important direction of current reforms in higher education in Kazakhstan is the relevance of the graduate employability skills to the needs of the labor market. One of the issues in this regard is the lack of collaboration between the industry and universities. Therefore, it becomes crucial to build this collaboration in an attempt to establish that match between what employers demand and what universities teach. This study will explore the expectations of Nazarbayev University graduates' employability skills from the perspectives of employers, NU students, NU administration and faculty. It is important to consider the perspectives of these three stakeholders, as their cooperation is essential to this process of bridging the gap between the labor market demand and graduates' preparedness to meet these demands. The study will also analyze the understanding of the concept of employability in a long-term career perspective.

**Methods.** This study will be conducted in several stages using a mixed methods design using focus groups, surveys, semi-structured interviews and curriculum analysis. The NU School of Engineering and the employability skills developed with the help of their academic programs will be the case study for this research because the School was created to become a "leading center of excellence" (1). In addition to investigating the views of NU students and employers, respondents will also include the following stakeholders: NU administration and NU School of Engineering faculty.

**Discussion.** *The main research question* for this study is: What are the stakeholders' expectations of NU engineering graduate employability skills for the current and future labor market? The following *subquestions* were formulated: What employability skills are important from the point of view of different stakeholders? How do different stakeholders understand their roles in developing students' employability skills?

**Conclusions.** With the first graduating class finishing in 2015, the government's concern is now on the graduates' employment rates. While this will reflect, to a certain extent, the skills and knowledge base that students acquired during their studies at NU, it will not demonstrate their employability and the employability skills they possess regardless of being employed or unemployed. Therefore, what becomes important to study in this regard is if there is any system in place or at least an understanding of the type of employability skills that are required by employers from engineering graduates in the labor market in Kazakhstan today. In addition to the current situation and needs, special attention should be devoted to the transferability of employability skills in that NU graduates should be able to not simply find their first jobs after graduation but also to move around in the labor market when they need to and develop their employability skills on their own. This research may be interesting for stakeholders concerned with students' employment and development of employability skills.

### References.

1. *Nazarbayev University Strategy 2013-2020*. Approved by the decision of the Supreme Board of Trustees from April 18, 2013. Astana: Nazarbayev University.