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Recruitment to MA LIS studies at the Institute of Information and Book Studies, University of Warsaw – the survey of candidates' motivation to different specialties

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Poland has been facing economic and structural reforms for more than a decade, as well as significant changes in politics and education (EU enlargement, Bologna process, Common European Education Area); also globalization processes influence the Polish education system. This refers either to modifications in primary and secondary education (which moved from 2-level to 3-level structure: 6+3+3 years) or the higher education. Previously the 5-years MA studies dominated in all types of universities and academies all around the country. Currently most of them has changed this structure according to the international requirements, also into a 3-level system: BA studies (3 or 4 years), MA studies (2 years), and Ph.D. studies (4 years).

The Institute of Information and Book Studies reformed both the curricula and system of studying in the years 1997-2001, as the Tempus project realized in cooperation with several European partners. Before these changes we were also offering 5 years MA studies, and the students were able to choose one of 3 specialisations (School Libraries, Information Science, Old and Rare Books) in the middle of the 3rd year. The reform aimed in separation of BA and

MA studies, and in their flexibility in regard to job market needs, quality assurance requirements, and students' interests. Main solutions proposed were:

- division into core and optional subjects at BA level,
- and the list of 11 specialisations called "paths" offered MA students.

Currently there are 16 paths proposed to the BA LIS graduates. In February – March each year the 3rd year BA students are given an opportunity to select, which of them are willing start in October. This choice is of course limited by the number of the interested, so the final procedure includes: students' selection – staff decision – moves of students whose proposal has not been accepted. Candidates from different fields or universities can choose from among the "shortlist" of usually 3 or 4 paths decided to be realized. For several years full time students have been choosing consequently only three of them: *Business Information*, *Old and Rare Books*, and *Editorship*. The situation is a bit different among extramural students, preferring *Library Organization and Management*, *Information Systems*, and *School Libraries*. Previous experiences and observations show, that the first group's criteria relate to job and career aspirations, while the latter – current job, it's stability, and remuneration (if talking about experienced librarians working for a quite a long time).

Also at the beginning of the year 2005 we asked the students about their preferences, and additionally – we surveyed them with a short questionnaire, to get some knowledge about their preferences and motivation. The survey included both full time and part time students. We received 47 questionnaires (85%, 12 men and 35 women) from the first group (in total 55 persons), and 160 (89%) questionnaires from extramural students (approximately 180 persons). Firstly, we asked them about a path's selection; the list of them and the results are showed in Table 1.

The questions asked

The questions asked referred to research interests and jobs being possessed or planned by the students at the moment. So we asked if they are working in information profession/position, and also if the employers influenced anyhow their path selections. We tried to found any links among research interests, paths selection, and BA thesis problems, asking for indication in which of IISBS divisions the students have been preparing their thesis. There are 4 Divisions in the Institute: of Librarianship (LIB), of Bibliography (BIB), of Information Systems (IS), and of Old and Rare Books (ORB). Usually paths are related to one of them (see Table 1).

We tried to found out the motives of the path selection, like: job/ profession, research interests, easy to be done (not many classes and/or exams), work with computers, none interest in any other paths. Important was also the question, where information about MA paths was found: the Institute website, the ECTS manual, the BA thesis tutor, the students group tutor, MA students, meeting with paths' tutors, or any other.

Path	Division	Full time students		Extramural students	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Children Libraries (CHL)	(LIB)	-	-	-	7
Bibliography (BGR)	(BIB)	-	-	1	3
School Libraries (SL)	(LIB)	-	-	2	14
Bibliotherapy (BTR)	(LIB)	-	1	-	17
Electronic Documents (ELD)	(ORB)	-	-	1	4
Editorship (ED)	(ORB)	5	12	1	5
Editorship & Old and Rare Books (ED/ORB)	(ORB)	1	4	2	5
Business Information (BI)	(IS)	2	9	2	3
Information and Communication in European Cultural Institutions (ICC)	(LIB)	-	1	1	2
Internet (INT)	(IS)	1	-	2	2
Library Organisation and Management (LOM)	(LIB)	-	-	7	52
Bookselling (BKS)	(ORB)	-	-	-	-
Information Systems and Databases (ISD)	(IS)	1	-	0	2
Old and Rare Books (ORB)	(ORB)	-	-	3	4
Information and Knowledge Management (IKM)	(IS)	2	7	7	8
Automated Library Systems (ALS)	(BIB)	-	-	-	-
Individual studies (IS)		-	1	-	-

Table 1. Students' selection of paths for the academic year 2005/2006. Detailed curricula of paths are available at: www.lis.uw.edu.pl

Full time students

Most of the students do not work regularly in information profession, only 8 (17%) of them mentioned their engagement in such a field. However, we must know, that this situation changes significantly among the MA students, most of which are working, and usually at information positions. This illustrate the job market requirement of at least BA diploma of the candidates being look for. Three of these 8 persons indicated, that their employers influenced the path selection. Even if it is not a significant result, usually it is referred to a market profile of an organization, and the requirements linked to a position, as well as the need of educating an employee according to particular expectations, what is cheaper than searching the job market for an expert. However we can assume, that in fact the employers do not know neither the potential of LIS graduates, nor the curricula (even in general).

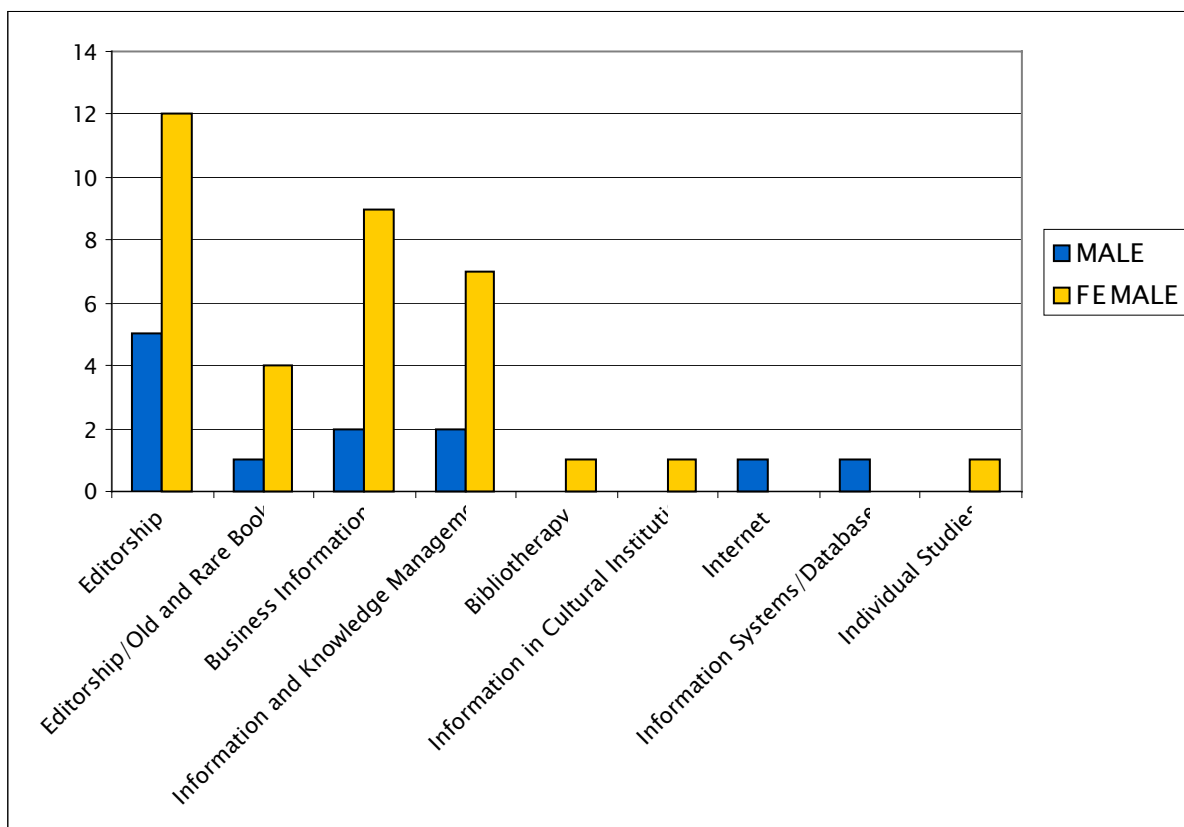


Diagram 1. Full time students' paths choices.

Asked about their preferences for professional life, two of third of the students preferred work as information professional than a librarian. This is strongly related to common public stereotypes concerning librarians vs. popularity of any activities with “information” in a title. “An information professional” is also perceived as more versatile than “a librarian”. However it have to mentioned, that in Poland we still do not have detail definitions of scopes of these two professions – or just one?

Asking the students of their BA thesis – in which division of our Institute they have been preparing them – we tried to find out any consequence in choices they made. A relatively small regularity can be found: many people selected a path run by a division they had prepared their thesis in, however most of them did it in the Division of Bibliography.

There are 3 persons studying also other fields, and again, more of them we can found among MA students, who try to develop their competencies, by studying also for example Polish language, pedagogy, politics.

Answers for the question concerning reasons of path selection seem to be inconsequent and in fact rash. Most of people choose answer B (research interests), but – as we can read below – in the same time they cannot indicate any reasonable research interests, just generals and banalities, answering for the question 5. There are also a few answers indicating job/profession (*Editorship*) or computers (*Business Information, Information and Communication Management*) as the reasons for selection. What is interesting, students selecting ICM indicated also an option “others”, like: job perspectives. This seems to be significant, as the students assume this path can be helpful in job searching and – hopefully – profitable.

The last question referred to the sources of information about MA paths. The

dominated answer was that about meeting with paths' tutors. In fact, it took place at the beginning of March, and the questionnaires were filled in just after that. The second answer indicated the Institute's website as a source of information. Less popular were: MA students, BA thesis tutors, and the students group tutor. These choices are comparable among different paths. It shows, that in fact most of the students were not looking for information, they were not active, just waiting for information prepared for them.

As we mentioned above, they were not able to answer for the question concerning their research interest. However, students perceive studies as preparation to vocational life more than research activities – only a few of them decide for entering Ph.D. studies. So at this stage – the end of BA course – most of them do not think about “researching”. In consequence they could only list terms which directly reflect paths' or subjects' names, like: editorship market, information, Internet, information management, databases. Key words, too general for people really interested and engaged in research in LIS field.

Of course there are also positive examples of interest fields, like: legal information, business marketing, information in cultural centres, reaching information clients.

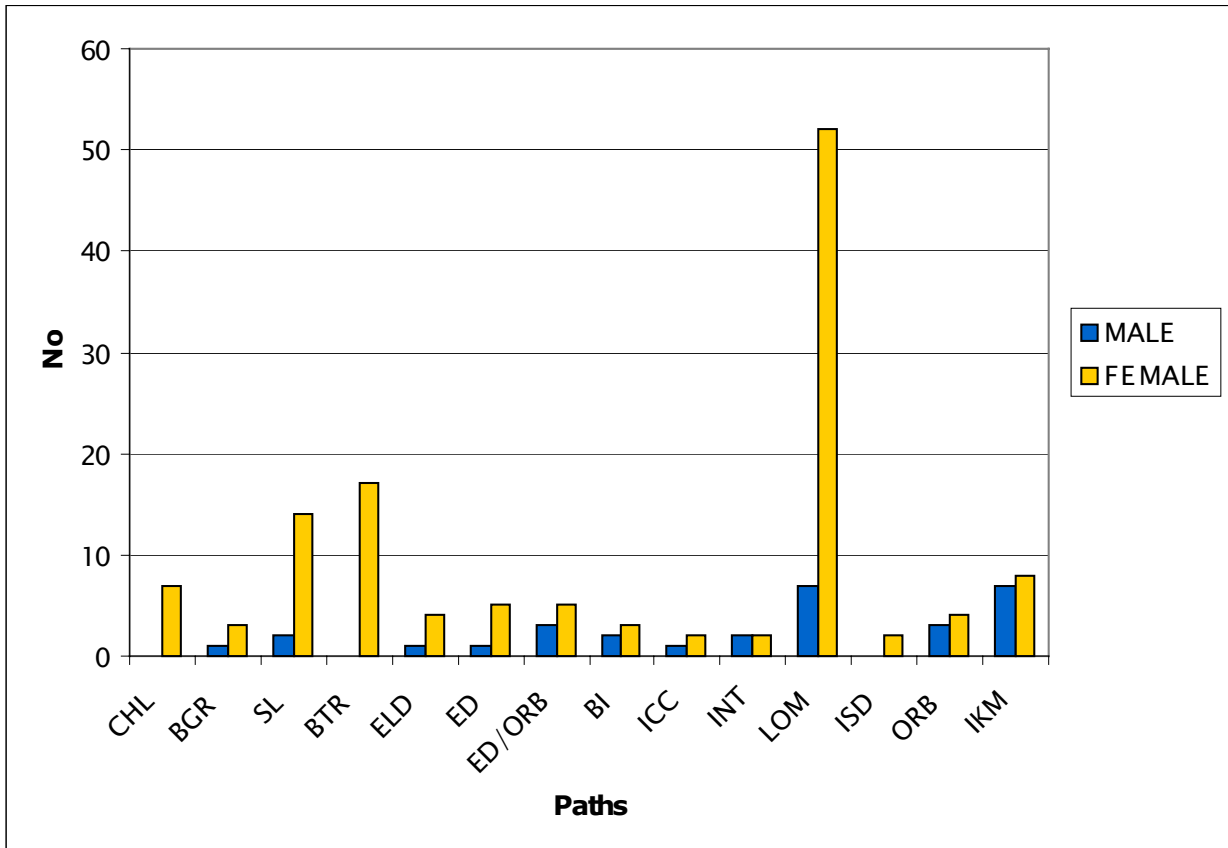


Diagram 2. Part time students' path choices.

Extramural students

The survey included in total 160 part time students, including 130 women and 30 men. Most of them work in information professions (104 = 65%). Again we can found only 19 positive answers (12%) concerning the employers' influence on the decision of MA specialization.

Most of the students would like to work as a librarian (as they in fact do) more than as an

information professional. They are more traditional in their perception of information jobs than full time students, what is quite obvious.

Consequently, their thesis were mostly prepared in the Division of Librarianship (79), then Division of Bibliography (30), of Old and Rare Books (21), and finally – of Information Systems (14). We can found more consequence in selection of tutors among this group of students – they choose those who work in Divisions “responsible” for selected paths (for example the Division of Librarianship runs the paths: Library Organisation and Management (36) and School Libraries (11), and these people make a group of 47 from among 79 students who prepared their thesis there. The least popular was the Division of Information Systems, what seems to confirm the traditional perception of the profession, and preferences of library than information work. Among working and studying librarians one can still found people being afraid of computers – and more: of subjects and lecturers’ expectations against their skills and knowledge in this range.

As we could expect, there is only one person studying different field, most of the students are working, and it made them to start extramural studies. Also the young people, the group of which has been growing for several years among extramural students, prefer working, earning money, and gathering experiences, than just knowledge during full time studies. However, there are students who try to join studying two fields in different forms: full and part time.

Most of the asked indicate their job/ profession as the main reason of path selection (98 – 61%). The second choice were research interests, however – similarly as in the case of full time student, as we can read below – in fact that cannot indicate and name properly their research interests. There were also several answers concerning work with computers.

The process of searching information about MA paths, their contents and forms, seems not to be very dynamic, nor initiated by the students. Most of them got some tips from the group’s tutor (78 – 49%), and from the IISBS website (39 – 24%), where both lists of subjects and descriptions of their contents can be found. The next choice were contacts with MA students, i.e. searching information about “real face” of the paths and their realization, about the lecturers, requirements, exams and so on. As the fourth possibility (19 – 12%) was declared a special meeting with paths’ tutors, organized at the beginning of summer semester. Usually they are attended by at least representatives of the Divisions, authorized to present all the paths run by a unit, a deputy director for students’ affairs, and the group’s tutor. This is a unique occasion of direct asking questions about both contents and forms of teaching, requirements, employment perspectives, and so on. The less popular “information source” was the BA thesis tutor, even if – as we showed above – extramural students more consequently choose their themes and tutors, regarding future path selection.

Part time students usually did not answered the question concerning their research interest. It can be related to the fact of their work, so they actually do not have “research attitude”, they just want to get an adequate diploma. However, among those listed we can found mostly stereotypical phrases connected with a path selected, like: library organization and management, bibliotherapy, business information, readership, knowledge management, information systems, editorship, old books, information science, bibliography, or Internet.

Findings

The following findings of the survey give us important knowledge about our students:

- there are significant differences between full time and extramural students in their motives and perception of current or future job,
- job aspirations: “librarian” among extramural students, and “information professional” among full time students,
- job perspectives: full time students do not work in the LIS field (or they do not want to admit it), while part time students usually work in libraries,
- only a few persons can really name their research interests,
- there is a strong connection between a BA thesis tutor and a division (and a path selected) among extramural students, however they in fact do not know the lecturers’ affiliation to divisions, better they know who is linked with which path.

Consequences for didactics

In the result of the curriculum reform done in 1997, previous 3 specialties were turned into 11 paths. In the years 1999-2003 two more paths were developed: Electronic Document (ED) and Business Information. The first one was proposed by the Division of Old and Rare Books, as a solution of negative recruitment for the paths offered earlier. Market economy and fast development of information society in Poland move the students’ interests from old and rare books more to information systems and economy. The second path was designed by the Division of Information Systems, as an option different than “electronic” paths – Internet and Information Systems/Databases. In the years 2004-2005 next two paths were designed: Information and Communication in European Cultural Institutions, and Information and Knowledge Management. The first one proposed by the Division of Librarianship, as its didactics concentrated too much on extramural MA students only. The second – again by the Division of Information Systems. It have to be mentioned, that there are paths which have not been selected by students for several years, like Bookselling, Bibliotherapy, Bibliography, Children Libraries, or Automated Library Systems. They are still in our offer, however soon they shall be either deleted or modernized.

New paths are designed and offered either as a reaction for students’ preferences, or in the result of research interests of the faculty, corresponding often with job market needs. The latter is in fact indispensable to prepare a proposal of a new path. Students’ choices are conditioned also by personal marketing of faculty members; for example depending on which Division their tutor comes from, they hear more about this or that group of paths. In consequence of such conditions and situations, we have realized that the students’ choices influence strongly dispersion of didactical tasks. It can in future results in changing the Institute’s structure and educational capabilities of teachers.

Required seem to be contacts and analysis of job market. It can be either an alumni club or individual contacts with the graduates, which would accept the students for internships, or agree for giving lectures as “guest-speakers”. There is also the question if the IISBS management shall decide which paths are opened in this or that academic year, basing not on students’ expectations (as too subjective), but on its own estimation of job market. Modernization and improvement of curricula according to the Bologna process requirement shall be done parallel, with an emphasis put on competencies and skills of the LIS graduates.

Conclusions

The conclusions which can be drawn from the results are:

- students' choices reflects their individual and subjective perception of current or future professional life, and perception of a job market, not an objective knowledge of it,
- also their choice is sometimes a compromise between their dreams, and awareness of popularity of the paths,
- most of the students are quite passive in getting information about the MA studies, usually they wait for information to come to them, instead of searching it,
- employers are not aware of the potential of LIS studies, and possibility of developing an employee profile according to their needs,
- the job market for information professionals can be characterized as still young, flexible, and very open, but having poor relations with LIS educational institutions (and vice versa), and poor knowledge about the graduates' competencies,
- we shall make better cooperation with the LIS sector, but also better contacts with our students and graduates, as in fact they will create a job market in the nearest future.

	No of students surveyed	17	5	11	9	1	1	1	1	1	47
		Editorship	Editorship/Old and Rare Books	Business Information	Information and Knowledge Management	Bibliotherapy	Information in Cultural Institutions	Internet	Information Systems/Data bases	Individual Studies	TOTAL
Sex	Male	5	1	2	2	0	0	1	1	0	12
	Female	12	4	9	7	1	1	0	0	1	35
1. Are you working in an information profession?	Yes	1	0	2	4	0	1	0	0	0	8
	No	16	5	9	5	1	0	1	1	1	39
2. Did your employer influenced your choice?	Yes	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
	No	16	5	10	8	1	1	1	1	1	44
3. Would you like to work in future as:	Librarian	7	2	2	5	1	0	0	0	0	17
	Information professional.	15	4	11	9	1	1	1	1	1	44
4. In which division have you prepared your BA thesis?	Of Librarianship	1	1	2	3	0	1	1	0	0	9
	Of Bibliography	8	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	12
	Of Information Systems	0	0	4	4	1	0	0	0	0	9
	Of Old and Rare Books	5	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
6. Are you also studying any other field?	Yes	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	3
	No	16	5	11	8	0	1	1	1	1	44
7. Please indicate the reasons for your path's selection	a) job/ profession	3	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	8
	b) research interests	14	5	9	7	1	1	0	1	1	39
	c) easy to be done	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	d) work with computers	1	0	6	3	0	0	1	0	0	11
	e) none interest in any other path	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	4
	f) other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	a) the Institute website	11	2	5	1	1	0	0	0	0	20
	b) the ECTS manual	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	6
	c) a BA thesis tutor	4	0	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	11
8. Where have you found information about MA paths?	d) a students' group tutor	2	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	8
	e) MA students	6	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	10
	f) meeting with paths' tutors	12	3	5	5	1	0	1	0	0	27
	g) other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 2. Results of full time students' survey.

No of students surveyed		7	4	16	17	5	6	8	5	3	4	59	2	7	17	160
		CHL	BGR	SL	BTR	ELD	ED	ED/ORB	BI	ICC	INT	LOM	ISD	ORB	IKM	TOTAL
Sex	Male	0	1	2	0	1	1	3	2	1	2	7	0	3	7	30
	Female	7	3	14	17	4	5	5	3	2	2	52	2	4	8	128
1. Are you working in an information profession?	Yes	5	3	13	11	4	4	3	2	2	3	44	1	4	5	104
	No	2	1	3	6	1	2	5	3	1	1	15	1	3	12	56
2. Did your employer influenced your choice?	Yes	1	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	9	0	1	0	19
	No	6	4	14	15	3	6	8	5	2	3	50	2	6	17	141
3. Would you like to work in future as:	Librarian	7	1	13	17	1	3	3	0	3	1	50	2	4	3	108
	Information professional.	2	3	2	1	4	2	2	3	3	3	13	2	4	5	49
	Of Librarianship	4	1	11	9	3	3	3	1	2	0	36	2	2	2	79
4. In which division have you prepared your BA thesis?	Of Bibliography	1	2	0	3	0	1	2	2	0	3	11	0	3	2	30
	Of Information Systems	2	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	3	0	2	2	14
	Of Old and Rare Books	0	0	3	3	2	1	2	0	0	0	9	0	0	1	21
6. Are you also studying any other field?	Yes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	No	7	4	16	17	5	6	8	5	3	4	58	2	7	17	159
7. Please indicate the reasons for your path's selection	a) job/ profession	4	3	10	12	3	1	1	2	2	3	49	1	3	4	98
	b) research interests	3	0	4	6	3	5	1	1	2	1	9	0	4	2	41
	c) easy to be done	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	7
	d) work with computers	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	2	0	1	4	1	0	2	14
	e) none interest in any other path	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	0	0	0	7
	f) other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
	a) the Institute website	1	0	5	7	4	0	0	1	2	2	11	0	4	2	39
b) the ECTS manual	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	1	1	1	12	
c) a BA thesis tutor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	4	
8. Where have you found information about MA paths?	d) a students' group tutor	5	1	7	7	1	1	1	1	1	0	51	0	1	1	78
	e) MA students	0	3	3	3	0	1	1	1	1	1	9	0	3	0	26
	f) meeting with paths' tutors	0	0	4	3	0	2	2	1	0	1	5	0	0	1	19
	g) other	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Table 3. Results of extramural students' survey. Full names of paths – see Table 1.