Chapter 4

Workforce Development through Student Development: Assisting Traditional-Aged Students in Community College

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ABSTRACT

Traditional-aged college students often lack soft skills which are, in essence, self-leadership skills needed for workplace and career success. Therefore, it is important to help students develop those skills in order to strengthen workforce development and promote long term career success. Students in a two year college have a limited time span in which to develop their soft skills. By using innovative practices, community colleges can work in collaboration with business and industry leaders in their area, and assist students in developing self-leadership skills. This chapter explores student development, community college & business partnerships and strategies that align education and practical experience to enhance career readiness, and describes a specific example of an innovative practice that is being used at a two year college in the metropolitan Atlanta area. The chapter also offers suggestions for readers who may want to implement particular components of the model.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is on the importance of student development in relation to workforce development in community colleges. Traditional-aged college students frequently lack the soft skills needed for workplace and career success such as good communication skills, creativity, problem solving skills, ability to work in teams, and emotional intelligence. These soft skills are, in essence, self-leadership skills. Students in a two year college have a limited time span, as compared to a four year college, in
which to develop needed soft skills. That also means that the two year college has a limited time span in which to assist students doing so. For some community college programs there is a very limited time span for training or aptitude development in the area of student development. Innovative practices, however, at the community college, in collaboration with business and industry leaders in the area, can assist students in a short time period to develop soft skills and provide the foundation for career success. With regard to workforce development efforts in two-year colleges, there are multiple components to consider—individual student readiness, the area’s business and industry buy-in, and the community college’s actual programs and services. This chapter delves a bit deeper into these interrelated components, and especially highlights the importance of student development in enhancing student readiness for workplace and career success.

The objectives of this chapter are threefold. The chapter will take a closer look at student development, especially in terms of developing self-leadership and soft skills to enhance students’ career readiness. The chapter will also take a closer look at collaborative partnerships with business and industry leaders in the community, especially looking at intentional strategies and programs that align education and practical experience. Finally, the chapter will take a closer look at an innovative practice model of soft skill development being used at a two year college in the metropolitan Atlanta area, and will discuss the key components of this kind of a model thereby offering suggestions for those who may want to consider implementation of those student development components to enhance their workforce development strategies.

**STUDENT DEVELOPMENT**

Workforce development is not independent of student development. In the context of the community college or technical college, those people who are recipients of workforce development programs and services are students. Knowing the developmental issues that students face during their time in college can assist community and technical colleges in preparing their students to be career ready. This section discusses student development theories, career development theories, and the development of the self-leadership skills of students so as to enhance their career readiness.

**Student Development Theories**

According to Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998), student development theory emerged from the disciplines of psychology and sociology in the mid-twentieth century. There are now a number of student development theories, most of which either focus on psychosocial development, cognitive-structural development, or typologies. McEwen (2003) stated that the theories consider “how students develop during college, how they learn, what elements come together to contribute to students’ success, and how the dynamics of college environments relate to educational purposes” (p. 155). There are also theories on adult development and career development, and these theories typically fall within the category of psychosocial development or typologies. It is also helpful, however, to look at cognitive-structural development in talking about adult development and career development.

Theories of psychosocial development examine a range of issues that college students must address. Those issues can include identity development, self-esteem and self-concept, relationships, autonomy and independence (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). They are related to how students define themselves,