

Chapter 2

Overview of Workforce Development in Education

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ABSTRACT

Workforce development focuses on economic development to boost a region's economic stability and prosperity, focusing on individuals. It is also described as the ability to sustain a workforce that can support current and future business/industry. Workforce and technical programs provide training in specialized fields to educate and prepare students to enter the workforce. Keeping in mind that business/industry requires trained employees, and employees need business/industry to create a sustainable lifestyle, decision-makers with knowledge and skills to lead their company and employees in a sustainable, prosperous direction are also required. This chapter explores workforce-development advisory committees, focusing on their relationship with community colleges and higher education. A particular focus is on the challenges growing and evolving workforce faces, and how to train and retrain to keep up with a changing and emerging workforce.

BACKGROUND

Higher education utilizes several terms to denote vocational education. These include terminal, vocational, occupational, career, technical, and workforce education (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Cohen, Brawer, Kisker, 2013). Prior to the 1940s, the term vocational denoted programs in agriculture, trades, and sales (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Cohen et al., 2014). In the 1940s, the term terminal included all studies, other than baccalaureate, leading to employment (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Cohen et al., 2014). The vocational programs were known as career education in the 1950s, geared toward younger students to acclimate them to future work, encompassing occupational and career studies (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Cohen et al., 2013). Vocational education was initially considered a necessary part of a student's education, and for those students not seeking a terminal degree, the two-year college offered skills training that was more advanced than skills they had learned in high school (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2013; Cohen et al., 2013; Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

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Workforce and technical programs provide training in specialized fields to educate and prepare students to enter the workforce (Hodges, 2012). For purposes of this discussion, workforce education is the term used to identify these programs at two-year institutions. Workforce education has been an integral part of the community-college curriculum since 1862 (Cohen et al., 2013; Library of Congress, 2010). In the 20th century, the expectation of community colleges was to train workers so that the U.S. would have a supply of skilled employees for industry (Cohen et al., 2013). Workforce education in the U.S. evolved through the Morrill Act of 1862, which allowed colleges to use the proceeds from federal land sales to establish institutions (AACC, 2014; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Library of Congress, 2010). Colleges focused on agriculture and mechanical arts, and the act created the first workforce-education initiative (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Library of Congress, 2010).

In the 1950s and 1960s, workforce education was considered only for those students who needed or wanted to complete formal trade schooling in order to be eligible to join the workforce (Cohen et al., 2014; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Since the 1970s, it has become common practice for students who complete their workforce programs to transfer to baccalaureate studies. This is due in part to the development of articulation agreements (Beach, 2011; Cohen et al., 2014; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Articulation agreements are partnerships between community colleges and four-year colleges or universities whereby certain courses taken at a community college are transferable to the four-year institution (Cohen et al., 2014; Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

From the 1960s through the 1980s, workforce education programs grew faster in community colleges than liberal-arts programs did, due to many factors (Cohen et al., 2014). These factors included the early leadership of the community-college movement in developing a focus on training students for the workplace. Other contributions to this growth included the Vocational Education Act of 1963 and its amendments; changing labor markets; increased enrollments of part-time students other than white, elite males; and absorption of adult education and occupational programs from secondary schools (Cohen et al., 2013). Cohen et al. (2013) also identify multiple legislative acts that affected the growth of workforce education in the U.S.:

- The Vocational Education Act in 1963
- The Vocational Education Act Amendments in 1968 and 1972
- The creation of the Comprehensive Employment & Training Act in 1973
- The Job Training Act in 1982
- The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act in 1984

The federal Vocational Education Act of 1963 and its subsequent amendments have had significant impact on workforce-education programs in community colleges. The act provided additional federal funds to community colleges to aid workforce programs, work-study programs, business education, educational classes, and research (Cohen et al., 2013). Congress approved the Vocational Education Act in order to align training with the needs of industry and business (Cohen et al., 2013). In 1968 and 1972, Congress approved additional funds through amendments to this act, which provided additional support for workforce-education programs, including training for students with disabilities (Cohen et al., 2013). The act redirected a major portion of funding to workforce-education programs in order to train and, in some cases, retrain students in skilled areas, especially in areas of technology (Vocational Education Act, 1963). In addition, the act also requires states to change and upgrade workforce training to coincide with economic demands and to compete globally (Cohen et al., 2013).

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