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Most metropolitan university students live in the region of the university and rely on their college degrees to secure a good career in that community. Business is concentrated in urban regions and relies on regional graduates to satisfy its skilled work force needs. This article recommends ways that universities and business can make this natural alliance more productive.

Business and the Metropolitan University

A New Partnership for the 1990s

Metropolitan university students are typically career-oriented persons who will spend their lives in the same region, and they expect their college degree to help them secure satisfactory employment. Business, which is concentrated in urban areas, in turn relies on regional universities to satisfy many of its work force needs. Metropolitan universities and business have struggled over several decades to develop relationships that would ensure good job opportunities for graduates and an adequate work force for business.

The overall results of these efforts remain somewhat frustrating to both universities and business, probably because the efforts too often have been inconsistent and shortsighted. During periodic downturns in the economy, employers cancel important activities, such as student internships and regular recruiting visits to campuses. When the economy prospers, universities often abandon the loyal practices that build sound relationships with employers and encourage students to "make their best deal." To further complicate this relationship, universities and employers fail to consult each other about critical decisions: employers frequently change their specifications for hiring without alerting the university until it is time to interview graduates, and universities routinely formulate curriculum without advice from the major potential employers of their students. If metropolitan universities and their regional businesses are to enjoy a more satisfactory, mutually beneficial relationship, both need to reevaluate their activities.

Adapting to the Changing Economy

The predictions of change to a service economy have been realized, and more than 90 percent of the new jobs in the United States for the remainder of the 1990s will be in the service industries. These are complex jobs that will favor the better-educated worker: accountants, nurses, computer programmers, paralegals, and auditors will be in very high demand. However, circumstances sometimes interrupt long-term trends, such as the recent conditions that approach a recession, slowing job growth significantly, and producing an uneven hiring demand for the class of 1990. Technical majors were recruited avidly and received considerably higher salaries than in prior years. Liberal arts graduates, who have been in and out of favor with businesses over the last several decades, did not fare as well as those with technical training. But it is predicted that for most of this decade liberal arts graduates, with some modification in their background, will be in a good position.

If universities are to have a larger role in determining the future success of their graduates, they must understand the consequences of these economic realities on an employer's needs.

What Urban Universities Must Do

For urban universities who are serious about preparing their graduates for the business careers of the 1990s, certain important steps must be undertaken.

1. Students need to be educated about economic realities, which in this era means understanding the changing economy and the concentration of careers in service industries. This career orientation should begin in the freshman year. Universities should introduce students to career options and the requirements to enter those careers, by inviting business people into the classroom. This is contrasted with the current practice at many schools where students begin their career investigations as seniors at the same time they are scheduling interviews through the college placement office. This peripheral attention to career preparation is already inadequate for most of today's graduates and will be absolutely disastrous for tomorrow's.

2. Students will be far better prepared for jobs upon graduation if they have had personal and direct contact with the world of business. Freshmen should be encouraged to obtain summer or part-time work in businesses that interest them. All metropolitan universities should have both co-op programs and internships, and any that do not should start them. Placements through these programs should be offered to students early in their college careers. Most metropolitan university students work throughout their college years; faculty should encourage students to tie in their work experiences with their educational development.

3. A service economy requires communications skills, possibly above all other abilities. Universities who care about their students' competitive advantage in the job market must emphasize communica-

tion, both verbal and written, regardless of the course of study. Company recruiters too frequently share stories describing 4.0 GPA accounting majors unable to write reports, and 4.0 GPA history majors who cannot make presentations. Relatively few universities require a speech course for graduation—all should add that to their curriculum. Business faculty, as well as liberal arts faculty, must routinely grade written reports for style, grammar, and the ability to communicate forcefully. And faculty who are accustomed to requiring only written reports need to add a requirement for oral presentations.

4. All marketable graduates also must be computer literate. Skills in word processing and spreadsheets are almost universally required in modern business, and courses in those subjects should be mandatory for all baccalaureate students. Universities should require freshmen to purchase a personal computer at the start of their college career.

5. Liberal arts colleges should consider curricular changes that will make their graduates more desirable to employers. Highly favored by business during the 1970s, the liberal arts graduate became noncompetitive against business school graduates in the 1980s. By the end of that decade, employers began once again to offer liberal arts graduates chances at business careers, but usually under the condition that they had taken some business electives. This appears to be a trend that will continue into the 1990s. Metropolitan universities, whose students are intensely interested in employment immediately after graduation from undergraduate programs, should consider how to give their liberal arts students this basic foundation in business: a minimum of three business courses, preferably accounting, economics, and finance. Employers act out of self-interest. A graduate with these courses will be favored over the person who, at best, can pledge to enroll in night classes after being hired.

6. The participation of career placement officers with job campaigns and interview training, which now typically begins at the end of the students' college life, must begin much earlier. Students should be required to familiarize themselves with the personnel and the information that is available in the placement office. A fine first step would be inviting the placement persons to come to the classroom to educate students on careers and job preparation. The creation of a course in selecting and preparing for careers is an ultimate goal for universities that want to ensure the employment success of their graduates.

7. Placement officers cannot be the only persons on campus who are familiar with business careers and career development. Faculty must become more familiar with the relationship between academic programs and their students' job opportunities. If the faculty are knowledgeable about business careers, qualifications for business careers, and career development, they can tie classroom material to real-world business situations. In addition they can give better counsel to students early in their college years about such valuable experiences as extracurricular activities, memberships in fraternities, etc. A faculty that is actively engaged in developing relationships with company representatives responsible for hiring will greatly increase the opportunities for their graduates.

8. Career placement offices must eliminate the practice of deciding on student interviews with recruiters by lottery and similar systems that are unrelated to the qualifications of the students. The results of these types of systems have been disastrous. Companies that spend the time, money, and preparation to interview on campus are entitled to see qualified students who have a genuine interest in the company. If these companies do not see these qualified students because of some first-come, first-served system, they simply will not come back.

9. Universities must begin more aggressive marketing of the career-development potential of their evening school programs. This marketing should be targeted to businesses and to students who are interested in career development and who are available primarily for evening courses. Many metropolitan universities have significant numbers of students enrolled in evening programs. Employers are often only generally acquainted with the nature of these programs, and evening students frequently are overlooked in career placement activities. Every major metropolitan university should develop a specific placement program for evening school graduates.

What Business Must Do

The burden of helping students prepare for the world of work cannot fall totally on the university. The business community must get much more involved in this effort at a much earlier stage. Corporate donations to universities and interviewing seniors for jobs after graduation are fine. They are simply not sufficient. The increased activity by business should parallel and reinforce the recommended activities by the university.

1. Business needs to do a better job of marketing itself and its career opportunities to students on campus. Campuses should not be visited only once for interviews. Visits should include classroom presentations, participation in career fairs, and other activities that will put business representatives into contact with students, faculty, and administrators. These visits must be aimed toward students in their freshman and sophomore years so that students who express an interest can be encouraged and counseled. Business must make appropriate representatives available for these visits, particularly for classroom engagements. Many personnel representatives do not have the specific business knowledge to make worthwhile classroom presentations to students. Line management should be recruited in greater numbers for this purpose.

2. Business must develop stronger relationships with faculty members. The education of faculty about careers and qualifications will help ensure accurate faculty recommendations, thereby preventing unnecessary student discouragement and disappointment. Interactions with faculty about what is being taught in the classroom will present opportunities for business people to influence course content.

3. Business needs to clarify its qualifications and to articulate them clearly to everyone in academia—students, faculty, and placement

personnel. It is most important that this information be conveyed accurately to students who are in their first two years of college. After all, how does it benefit a senior to learn that an employer gives preference to new graduates with part-time work experience when the opportunity is past for that senior to gain such experience before graduation?

4. Business must be totally honest about the availability of career opportunities. During periods of economic downturn or corporate re-trenchment, it serves no useful purpose for a company to conduct recruiting visits at universities when there are no positions available. No other recruiting practice has created a more negative image among students. Business should not simply remove itself from its relationships in such times, but it should explain the situation honestly and offer to assist students in other ways to prepare for careers.

5. If university co-op and internship programs are to succeed, business must offer jobs and placements. Part-time and summer jobs, co-op and internship placements—all give interested faculty an opportunity to develop career-related programs and help students become prime candidates for full-time jobs as graduates.

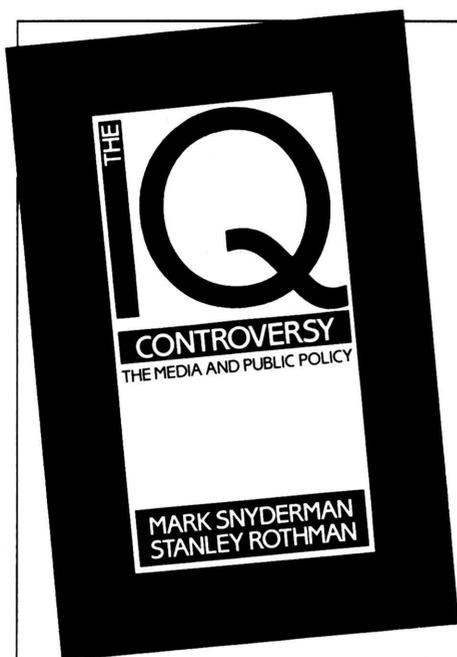
A New Partnership

These suggestions highlight what metropolitan universities and business must do to form solid partnerships for the benefit of their career-oriented students in the 1990s. The recommendations reflect the two major issues regarding training and education that most businesses will face. The first of these is the need to educate for change and fluidity, and not for stability. The second is the need of business to ensure lifelong learning opportunities for their employees.

These two factors, which will dominate the American business landscape, are brought about primarily by the ever-changing world of technology. Both present enormous challenges and opportunities for the metropolitan university, which educates a large percentage of the skilled workers and professionals for major businesses. These two issues, more than any others, also provide the basis for metropolitan universities to initiate partnerships with business—partnerships that could bring stronger political and financial support for public institutions. Employers now spend upwards of \$40 billion a year on training programs, in part to remedy what is not taught well in colleges and universities. Employers realize that this expense is growing and will only be a drop in the bucket compared to the needs of educating the future work force. A dialogue with company trainers is a good first step for universities to understand what employers need. If this initial link were established, it would be easier on everyone to implement the strategies suggested in this article.

These recommendations do not suggest that education for the future work force requires metropolitan universities to become technical institutions. Faculty and administrators must begin to think in terms of educating young people to face times of change, uncertainty, and innovation. This does require a combination of liberal and technical educa-

tion, and a reevaluation of the curriculum. The specific suggestions here would mean adding on only several "technical" courses for all career-oriented liberal arts students—courses such as economics, accounting, and finance. Many of the recommended changes relate to strengthening much of what is already basic to a liberal arts curriculum—good communication skills, critical thinking, basic mathematical skills, computer literacy, and the ability of an educated mind to adapt creatively to change and to respond to the environment. The fundamental change requires universities to break down the isolation between what happens to students on their way to graduation and what happens to them afterwards. Those who adopt this simple principle and apply it to their future educational efforts will stand the best chance of forming lasting and effective partnerships with business during the 1990s and beyond.



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