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ABSTRACT

Although the benefits of articulation between secondary and postsecondary vocational programs are clear, progress in articulation between proprietary schools and secondary and/or postsecondary programs has been slow. The fundamental barrier to articulation between proprietary schools and postsecondary vocational education programs is faculty reluctance to be associated with a school that aims to make a profit. Besides faculty reluctance, the following present major barriers to articulation: communication breakdown, lack of enthusiasm, inability to sell the concept at the top level, leadership, staff elitism, and reluctance to change curriculum. Strategies for overcoming these barriers include arranging regularly scheduled meetings in the various schools, publishing a newsletter on the articulation effort, establishing an inservice meeting to disseminate information about the articulation effort, focusing on "students first," bringing in consultants, involving top personnel in planning, having representatives from both institutions on committees, and redesigning curricula at both schools. Three types of articulation are (1) private occupational schools that accept secondary vocational program graduates into their educational offerings, (2) cooperation between two or more proprietary schools, and (3) arrangements whereby graduates of proprietary schools are accepted into and continue their education at a community college or four-year school. This last type, transfer of credit, is the most common and is used in a variety of places. (KC)

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OVERVIEW

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON ADULT, CAREER, AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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OVERVIEW

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Clearinghouse on Adult, Career,
and Vocational Education

ARTICULATION BETWEEN SECONDARY OR POSTSECONDARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND PROPRIETARY SCHOOLS

The benefits of articulation between secondary and postsecondary vocational programs are clear. Miller and Imel (1987) credit well-thought-out articulation arrangements with reducing duplication of learning, increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of learning, improving program content and standards, allowing for fuller use of existing program facilities and equipment, providing a more attractive option for students and thereby supporting high school completion, and enabling postsecondary institutions to obtain larger enrollments and better prepared students.

As the benefits of articulation become more widely understood, increasing research is being done on the subject. Little research has yet to be done, however, on articulation between vocational programs at the secondary and/or postsecondary level and proprietary schools. This Overview will examine the barriers to articulation, some successful articulation arrangements and models, and strategies for initiating and maintaining articulation arrangements.

What Are Proprietary Schools?

According to Parnell (1985), there are an estimated 6,000 proprietary (private) technical schools throughout the United States. Lerner (1987) defines them as "for-profit institutions, both schools or colleges, that provide occupational programs" (p. vii) and adds that they may be publicly or privately held.

According to Lerner, proprietary schools have been formally recognized as part of the postsecondary system since the 1972 Education Amendments. Students enrolled in proprietary schools became eligible for federally insured loans in 1965 and have been eligible for other federally sponsored loan and grant programs since 1972. Proprietary schools are also permitted to contract with local educational agencies to provide vocational training programs supported through the Vocational Education Act.

Lerner stresses that despite their often humble beginnings modern proprietary schools generally have excellent facilities, staffed with well-trained professionals, outfitted with up-to-date equipment, and operated with all the benefits of large investments by their owners. They are accredited by four specialized agencies—the Accreditation Commission of the Association of Independent Colleges and Schools (AICS), the National Association of Trade and Technical Schools (NATTS), the National Home Study Council, and the National Cosmetology Accreditation Commission of Cosmetology Arts and Sciences—in accordance with the procedures established by the Council of Postsecondary Accreditation.

Of course, the fact that proprietary schools are indeed somebody's investment sets them apart from other public and private (not-for-profit) schools and colleges. Because of their for-profit nature, proprietary schools are frequently held in low esteem and regarded with skepticism by members of the educational community and sometimes by government policymakers.

What Are the Barriers to Articulation?

The fundamental distinction between proprietary and nonproprietary schools with respect to concern for making a profit has made many faculty members reluctant to enter into articulation arrangements with proprietary schools. Besides faculty reluctance, Lerner (1987) identifies the following as major barriers to articulation between secondary or postsecondary vocational programs and proprietary schools: communication breakdown, lack of enthusiasm, inability to sell the concept at the top level, leadership, staff elitism, and reluctance to change curriculum. Although more minor in nature, the following things also deter the development of articulation agreements: the perceived need to delay final agreements until every detail is complete, indecision about whether or not to test incoming students to determine credit, failure to determine competency levels or grades at the outset, and reluctance to borrow ideas from other successful programs.

Lerner suggests several strategies for overcoming each of the major barriers. For example, he recommends arranging regularly scheduled meetings in the various schools, publishing a newsletter on the articulation effort, and establishing an inservice meeting to disseminate information about the articulation effort as ways of circumventing a communication breakdown. Lack of enthusiasm and inability to sell the concept can be remedied by such means as discussing the advantages of articulation with students, bringing in consultants, and promoting occasional dinner meetings. Obtaining a commitment from schools' top-level administrators, involving top personnel in planning, arranging for teachers and counselors from the various institutions to get to know one another, and focusing efforts on a different curriculum if some faculty attitudes cannot be changed are all ways of overcoming the barrier of leadership, staff, or faculty reluctance. Elitism and reluctance to change the curriculum can be addressed by promoting a "student first" concept, mixing administrators and faculty from both institutions in committee work, ensuring that all parties are sensitive to "turn" considerations and are prepared to be flexible, seeking input from advisory committees, redesigning curricula at both ends to be competency based, and focusing on rearranging sequences rather than content (Lerner 1987, pp. 23-27).

Examples of Articulation

Lerner (1987) has identified three types of articulation between secondary or postsecondary vocational programs and proprietary schools. He states that the first type—private occupational schools that accept secondary vocational program graduates into their educational offerings—is still quite rare. Noting that community colleges have only recently begun to recognize the competencies offered in secondary vocational programs, he states that the practice of granting credit for competencies mastered in secondary programs has a positive implication for proprietary schools. Lerner also finds little evidence of the second type of articulation, that is, cooperation between two or more proprietary schools. The third type of articulation—arrangements whereby graduates of proprietary schools are

accepted into and continue their education at a community college or 4-year institution—is apparently gaining in popularity. Lerner notes that both the AICS and NATTS have had committees working on such articulation arrangements.

Policies providing for the transfer of credit from one institution to another are by far the most common type of articulation arrangement. The following credit transfer policies are only a few of those identified by Lerner (1987). Tampa College, a private baccalaureate degree-granting business school, will accept a block of 112 quarter credit hours into its technical management baccalaureate program and will also accept one-half to three-quarters of the courses taken at United Electronics, a private trade school, on a course-by-course basis. Strayer College, a baccalaureate degree-granting proprietary school in Washington, D.C., and Commonwealth College, a proprietary school in Norfolk, Virginia, have an articulation agreement whereby graduates from Commonwealth with a 2.0 cumulative grade-point average on a 4.0 scale will be accepted into Strayer. Yet another type of transfer policy exists within the ITT network of private occupational (proprietary) schools, which have agreed to accept transfer students with similar associate degrees from proprietary schools.

Examples of articulation agreements between degree-granting proprietary schools and 4-year colleges or universities include those between Urbana College (a private nonprofit college) and Bliss College (a proprietary business college) in Ohio and between the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) in Rochester, New York, and the Ohio Institute of Photography (OIP), a proprietary school in Dayton, Ohio. According to the terms of the latter agreement, transfers from OIP can complete a bachelor of science degree at RIT in 2 years plus 2 summers.

Besides credit transfer policies, Lerner has identified the following types of articulation: contracting to offer classes for 3 other institutions, combined enrollments, shared facilities, enrichment programs, 1 + 1 and 2 + 2 programs, and pretechnology programs.

Long and his colleagues (1986) describe an articulation arrangement that Cuyahoga Community College (CCC) in Cleveland, Ohio, has developed with seven proprietary schools located in Cuyahoga County. The program is noteworthy in that it combines elements from the 1 + 1 program model with arrangements for sharing facilities and contracting to offer classes for other institutions. A career ladder approach was developed whereby CCC accepts students who have completed a 1-year diploma (the first "1" in the 1 + 1 model) program at the proprietary schools. These students then receive 45 quarter credit hours of advanced standing toward completion of CCC's associate of technical study degree program. The agreement also provides for CCC to refer students to the proprietary schools for occupational programs that are not currently offered at the community college. When this happens, students take all their laboratory and related courses at a proprietary school and complete their general education course work at CCC. CCC also teaches certain courses in developmental and general education within the proprietary school setting on a contractual basis (pp. 59-60).

Developing Articulation Agreements

Individuals interested in developing articulation agreements involving their own schools can find sample articulation agreements, curricula, and an interview protocol sample in Long et al. (1986). Lerner (1987) also lists 14 action steps for articulation. These cover all stages of the process of developing an articulation agreement from needs assessment to selecting one or two program areas in which to begin to develop written agreements providing secretarial support for and publicizing the articulation arrangement.

REFERENCES

This ERIC Digest is based on the following publication:

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