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*The public urban universities directly serve their communities by educating the future workforce and providing community service and continuing education for the present one. Most of the people who will work in an urban community, including the leadership of its public and private sectors, grew up in the city and obtained their education there. The article describes two innovative programs at Queens College of the City University of New York which prepare their students not only for their first steps on the career ladder but provide, as well, a basis for their subsequent development. Both programs were developed and are implemented in close collaboration with employers.*

# Metropolitan Universities and the Multicultural Workforce

The public urban university is the twentieth-century version of the land-grant college. Just as land-grant institutions served and still serve the agricultural and economic necessities of the state, so urban institutions directly serve their communities by educating the future workforce and providing community service and continuing education for the present one.

Now, when everyone worries about the workforce, public metropolitan universities should surely come into their own as never before. The majority of new workers in any city will come from its homegrown population. New York is a mecca for talented young people from around the globe, but most of the people who will work there grew up there.

That's true for the city's leadership too. According to a recent Standard and Poor's survey, more top corporate executives received their undergraduate education at the City University of New York than at any other institution; Yale came next, then Harvard. There are many reasons for that outcome—but one, of course, is the fact that New York has the largest number of corporate heads, and a lot of top executives never left their hometown. The situation is likely to be similar in other cities. Hence metropolitan universities face a two-fold challenge: to provide their students a broad liberal arts education for a full career and a full life, and to provide the bridge from college to first job.

Both corporations and universities are only beginning to focus on workforce issues. Most colleges have

responded to workforce needs by expanding professional and technological programs, from MBAs to associate degrees in particular technologies. Undergraduate business majors constitute a large fraction of the enrollment at most traditional institutions. Meanwhile, the most prestigious colleges have felt comfortable with liberal arts as the undergraduate curriculum, knowing that recruiters will come to their campuses anyway. Many metropolitan universities find themselves pulled in opposite directions. Recent innovations at Queens College suggest one way of resolving the dilemma.

Queens College of the City University of New York is located on seventy-six acres of prime city land, in a borough of two million people. It started out as the "People's College" in 1937, with two hundred students, seven of whom were black. Most of the early students were Irish, Italian, and Jewish, particularly immigrants; for example, large numbers of Jews fleeing the Holocaust. Classes were originally housed in quaint Spanish-style buildings. There was an apple orchard, gently rolling hills, a large main building that housed both the library and the gym, a yearbook, student talent shows. All in all, it was a bucolic scene.

For most of our history we aspired to be the same as private institutions, except that there was no tuition. We read the same texts and attracted a strong faculty, many of whom might have preferred to be at a conventional, private institution.

But we are not a traditional college. We are different because our mission is *not* to educate the privileged, although some of our students could afford to go elsewhere. Our central mission is to provide large numbers of students an entree into the middle-class—a remarkably American idea—and to provide a workforce for New York.

Today we have 17,500 students. Sixty percent of our students are first-generation college students, and at least 80 percent work. Most are twenty-one or younger, and the majority are women. They tend to be highly motivated; many of them have strong family pressures to succeed. Forty percent are minorities, and 45 percent are immigrants or children of immigrants. They come from 120 different countries and speak 66 different native languages. Some speak several languages—one boy recently told me that he talks Portuguese to his mother, Spanish to his father, and English to his sister. The largest groups are Hispanic-Americans, African-Americans, Chinese-Americans, Korean-Americans, Italian-Americans, and Greek-Americans. For many—Russian Jews, Dominicans, Ethiopians, etc.—the "American" part is very new.

Describing our students also describes the most vital element of the workforce of New York in the years ahead. By the year 2000, three-fourths of new employees will be minorities and women.

We at Queens College have only recently begun talking about workforce issues. Throughout our history students have had a strong standard liberal arts education. They used to read all the great books in a four-semester contemporary civilization course, directly imported from Columbia University. They also had speech courses to teach them to talk radio-announcer English instead of Queensian.

And the policy paid off. Our students became leading doctors, lawyers, professors, and corporate executives. The success rate was remarkable, because the students were not only bright but hungry for success—their families depended on them.

At our 1990 graduation, one of our honorary degrees went to a student who graduated in 1947, Yale critic Geoffrey Hartman. He thanked us for that seventeen-year-old immigrant boy he had been in the 1940s, who could not have gone to college had it not been for free education at Queens College. Then our student speaker, a brilliant graduate in political science, spoke of arriving here four years ago from Poland with two hundred dollars in his pocket and finding heart-warming hospitality that made his degree possible. We were moved by the sense of immutable mission, of history repeating itself.

Our tradition of educating the poor and the immigrant has remained unchanged except that the new immigrants come from different places—Africa, Latin America, the Far East. Their diversity is a great resource for the city of New York—if we can mesh their talents with employers' needs.

There is no question that our students are going to college in order to get jobs. Faculty of an older generation still talk about education for its own sake, still make the old pronouncements about how liberal arts make one a better and more humane person. But plainly and simply, our students need jobs. They have to help their families; they have to work before or after classes; and few have the leisure to cast aside the economic realities of life to enjoy the pleasures of the mind, unhampered by practical thoughts.

We need to educate our students for work, but it would be a terrible mistake to let them focus four or more years of college only on landing that first job. At the same time, the faculty has a strong responsibility to make sure that their degrees count with personnel officers.

So we must still give them a strong liberal arts education as we did in the 1940s. The liberal arts are survival skills for immigrants and minorities entering mainstream America. But then we need to help them prepare for—and get—jobs.

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## The Business and Liberal Arts Program

The Business and Liberal Arts (BALA) program at Queens College is one way to do that. The program combines a major in whatever liberal arts field a student chooses with a minor in business-related subjects.

Perhaps the most unusual element of this program is its parentage. Queens College established a corporate advisory board comprising half corporate executives and half academics from various departments to look at ways to make our students attractive to business. The executives felt, as we did, that undergraduate liberal arts education was the best route to a full career but not the easy path to a first job. Therefore, we decided to combine the liberal arts major with a minor in business specifically designed for this program.

At the suggestion of a board member, we surveyed 1,500 personnel officers in the greater metropolitan area to see what they wanted that was missing from job applicants. The answer came loud and clear: they wanted people who could write and speak—the top priority—and people who could analyze problems and make decisions. They sought people who could use their heads and make themselves understood.

We designed a program that has speaking and writing requirements in every course. We also made sure that each course requires a different computer application. The courses themselves begin with a freshman seminar, followed by a speech course, writing, accounting, law and ethics of business, and a senior seminar in decision making. Business people lecture, host visits, and sometimes teach. The students like their exposure to executives a lot. Our corporate board members also attend the students' annual two-day retreat. And perhaps most important of all, they help us with internships and mentoring.

The corporate advisory board is the key to our success. First of all, through their efforts we developed a program that meets their needs and has their involvement, rather than a plan that we as academics speculated might be good for business. It is *not* the program we would have designed without their help. It is stronger on liberal arts components than our faculty would have had the nerve to assert as business preparation. But it exactly matches our own philosophy. The curriculum is not a result of academics preaching educational philosophy; it comes from business people concerned about the bottom line. Their word has a powerful impact in the business community.

The board's corporate and academic members feel that educating undergraduates in a "how-to" curriculum is a waste of valuable time. The technologies and systems they would study change too rapidly in the outside world. Moreover, many companies would prefer to train students on their systems rather than retrain them. But the writing and speaking skills,

the need to understand accounting for management, the modes of problem-solving will adapt to any business.

The “how-to” component is encompassed in the internship program. Our students must work anyway and through the internships they are able to work in meaningful jobs. We have placed students in many leading companies in New York. Students’ special language or cultural knowledge has sometimes been utilized—one young man who lived in China, for example, did a Chinese marketing project. We demand academic work in relation to these internships. The supervisors have taken special care with these students, and we have received rave reviews.

BALA enables our students to “learn the language of business.” They understand the concepts and the vocabulary. Some will decide on MBA programs; others will pursue other fields; some will find permanent placements through their internships. In any case their education is richer for the experience. The BALA courses hone their thinking skills—and that’s what liberal arts education is all about.

From a campus point of view, the program has had another important effect. Each of the courses in the curriculum was newly designed by subcommittees of corporate and academic members. Teachers of all courses continue to meet together to make sure that the courses complement each other, so that students are learning and then reinforcing skills. Because academics collaborated with business people who had no preconceptions about various courses, from English to accounting, we experienced a kind of zero-base course design.

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For example, the speech course was shaped to business needs. Most managers give very few public speeches, but make a lot of presentations to small groups or to their supervisor. Similarly, most college writing courses demand that students write for an audience (the professor) who knows more about the subject than they; business writing, on the other hand, conveys information to people who know less about the subject. Reports must be informative, lucid, and concise. They are structured to convey information as rapidly and efficiently as possible, and so sentences and paragraphs are formed for that purpose. Most accounting courses teach people how to be accountants, but our students need to know accounting principles for management purposes.

The newly designed courses had a spin-off effect. What worked for BALA students turned out to be good for lots of other students as well. What began as designer courses for a small program turned into innovations in the broader curriculum. Looking at standard courses in new ways had a vitalizing effect.

The program has gotten considerable attention. Our initial survey informed 1,500 personnel officers that we were doing something new and shaping it according to their advice. Newspapers carried articles on the program, and the public attention helped a large group of students in our cooperative education program and in the job market, as well as the BALA students.

We reinforced the effect with a number of public forums and workshops on workforce issues, ranging from training sessions on managing diversity to a major conference, sponsored by PepsiCo, on “What Business Needs to Know to Succeed in New York City: Attracting and Retaining a Qualified Workforce in the 1990s.” The programs, which have involved our corporate advisory board, focus on important New York issues and associate Queens College with them. Our BALA students, of course, attend, along with CEOs and top personnel officers, another experience that increases the students’ comfort level in the business world.

Most of our students do not come from homes in which they see a lot of corporate executives (although, judging from the past, many of our students will become CEOs). They will not, by and large, get jobs through their fathers’ golf partners. But they may well do so through their sponsors and mentors, who appreciate the motivation and initiative—many remember it from their own lives.

One final plus: working students in a large urban commuter institution have few opportunities to bond with other students. But if they are in small, close-knit programs, it happens. An honors program, programs for students who need special help, programs, such as theatre, that require cooperation for success, make it happen. BALA does too—the students tell us that when fall begins, they are eager to see old buddies in their BALA courses. That too is important.

### **The Journalism and Liberal Arts Program**

Given the success of the BALA program, Queens College initiated a similar journalism program. The media have a strong need for more diverse personnel, and we have students who can meet their needs.

The journalism advisory board comprises top-level journalists in the New York area, and academics from various fields. Despite the intensity of their schedules, the editors, publishers, and reporters generously give their time to these students. These professionals firmly believe that liberal arts education is the best preparation for their field, so we designed a curriculum comparable to BALA—a minor to complement any major. The courses themselves are far more professionally oriented than BALA: a gateway course that describes the “map” of journalism, a two-semester reporting course, editing, electronic media news, and a final seminar. Here, too, internships are key, and this board is even more enthusiastic about the

importance of mentoring. The courses have been taught by visiting journalists, and the students have had VIP tours of the newsrooms of New York and working lunches with the publishers.

This summer we sponsored our first summer program for minority high school journalists, supported by The Dow Jones Foundation and the New York newspapers. Those students also got the royal treatment.

The press needs more minority members. They feel the need and want to help us increase the pool. Some of the summer students have decided to come to Queens College and pursue journalism; all of them have had incredible growth in their interviewing and writing skills.

The journalism advisory board also sponsors conferences focused on the hottest issue—racial tensions and the press. In 1989, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the deaths of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman (a Queens College student when he died), and Michael Schwerner (brother of a then-faculty member), a conference focused on “Civil Rights and Journalism, Then and Now.” Participants and reporters in Mississippi Freedom Summer spoke about 1964, and contemporary reporters spoke about now.

Last year a conference looked at “Governing and Covering a Tense New York City.” Our timing was impeccable: the conference coincided with the rising tensions of Bensonhurst, the Family Red Apple grocery store incident in which blacks boycotted Koreans, another incident in which blacks and Vietnamese clashed, and the Central Park Jogger case. Mayor David Dinkins, our keynote speaker, talked about how the media inflame racial situations. So did members of the press. The conference had powerful effects. Mayor Dinkins’ statements were widely reported—and heeded. It was the beginning of a cooling-down period in press coverage of racial strife.

The topic, the speakers, the energy, came from the journalism advisory board. Our journalism students, of course, profited from attending and from the press attention the program received.

In both BALA and journalism, we responded to the special nature and mission of our college, and to the special needs of our city. That is why they have worked so well. Our students need jobs and they will most likely find them in New York. Our corporations and media need a multicultural workforce. It’s a perfect match.

### **Campus Initiatives**

But it is presumptuous to assume that because our students are multicultural and we feel great pride in our diversity, we have no workforce problems within. Because we were going to work with corporations on issues of diversity, we felt our first task was to make sure our own house was in order. Just as courses spun off from the new BALA courses, our

outreach symposia accelerated internal efforts to assure a hospitable environment for multicultural students.

Our rhetoric is boastfully multicultural. We are proud of the fact that for the last three years about half of our new faculty hires have been minorities and half have been women. The results are directly related to the creation of an incentive pool for outstanding minority hires; however, the number of people hired has far outstripped the special resource pool. In spite of that effort, our faculty is still 84 percent white and 68 percent male, because many tenured Queens College faculty members are in the 50 to 60 age range, and hiring was different when they came to Queens. But the student body has changed dramatically in ethnicity.

Three years ago, I created a president's council on multiculturalism, believing that for effective affirmative action the impetus must come from the top.

The council divided into subgroups looking at courtesy and hospitality, curriculum, outreach, and multicultural training. Each group has pursued its own ends. The multicultural training subcommittee initiated a campus-wide program combining staff courses on civility and multicultural training. We began with numerous classes, taught by faculty and staff, to work with secretaries, lab technicians, and other employees. At first there was resentment and hostility. Staff members asked the legitimate question: Why were we saying they needed any training when professors were not going to these classes? Top administrators *did* have sessions, though a truncated version. The administrators initially demonstrated more hostility than the secretaries.

But a lot of good things happened. Staff members did learn, and many enjoyed the course. They got to know each other better. They came up with wonderful ideas, many of which cost very little or nothing, to make the campus a better place. So administrators have learned from them. And new lines of communication have been opened, not only between staff members but between staff and administrators.

Next, logically, will come the faculty. That will be the hardest job. According to those that have tried these programs before, faculty sessions are well nigh impossible. But we will try.

Beyond training in civility in multicultural communications, we are looking at the core curriculum. The curriculum, after all, is where the power lies—it focuses on the “important” cultures or traditions; it says they matter, they are better, and therefore we must preserve them. Most of the core curriculum, not only at Queens College but everywhere, consists of the traditional Western, male-dominated great books.

We're experimenting. We are developing a world studies four-semester sequence that should become our generation's answer to contemporary

civilization decades ago. Like BALA and journalism, world studies has had splendid ripple effects in our curriculum. We also have had varied ethnic studies programs, and they are going strong.

But there is a lot more we can do. For example, there must be ways that we can utilize our students' language skills to greater effect in their college education and in their careers. Most Americans have considerable trouble with proficiency in second languages, but many of our students are comfortably bilingual—can't we capture that strength and use it in their education?

Secondly, our students have special opportunities to learn from one another as well as learn to get along together. And think of the possibilities in terms of voluntary service, given their cultural diversity.

Third, we can diversify arts programming, both for our students and for the larger community. The arts are our universal language, and cultural respect and understanding probably come most easily by responding to them. Although our faculty read Latin American novels, attend South African plays, and listen to many varieties of music, we don't do a lot about making sure our students have the same opportunities.

There are many other efforts at Queens College and at other metropolitan universities related to valuing diversity. The growing multicultural richness of our campuses is the most exciting and potentially rewarding aspect in education in many years. It will have profound effects on all of American education. Right now Queens is far ahead of the national statistics in ethnic diversity—but not for long. What we are experiencing today will be widespread by the year 2000. The trick is to be ready for the changes rather than reacting to them once they are here.

We can learn something from corporations in terms of preparing now for the changing student body and workforce of the next decade. The fact that people learn differently now and have a different world to learn about is a plus, although all too often we have painted it as a minus. Not only new technologies but new thought patterns will require us to break habits, look at problems anew, take fresh approaches.

Both business and the academy have in recent times had the attitude that we will open our doors to "them" and encourage "them" to become just like us. There are two problems with this attitude: first, "they" want to be themselves, and second, the "us" of the United States has changed dramatically. The mythical "typical American student" is not the one etched in our memories by our own college experiences in a different era—"we" and "they" are the "us" of tomorrow.

Certainly the students at public urban institutions, particularly the commuter colleges, are a new breed. We must learn—fast—how to expand our horizons and incorporate the differences into what the mayor of New York City calls "that gorgeous mosaic" that is essential to the future health of our cities—and our country.

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