



# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT: PREPARING A NEW WORKFORCE

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Student employment is a key opportunity for student affairs practitioners to engage in leadership development. As the population of students seeking higher education shifts, now is the time for us to step forward fully and embrace our ability to enrich leadership development through the realm of student employment.

Over the past 25 years, higher education has seen an unprecedented expansion of access to students. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the number of students pursuing an education at colleges and universities has been steadily rising (2018). In 2015, fall enrollments at postsecondary institutions were up 23% over the levels just ten years prior. Much of this growth has come from historically underrepresented groups. From fall 1976 to fall 2015 the percentage of Hispanic students increased from 4% of college students to 17%. Gains among African Americans during this period were more modest, increasing from as low as 10% to as high as 15%. White students, who once made up as much as 84% of the total percentage of college students, made up about 58% of students during this timeframe (Snyder, DeBrey & Dillow, 2018).

This expansion in access carries with it the potential for economic prosperity. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), “Earning a college degree remains one of the most important investments one can make in his or her future. Over a lifetime, the average American with a bachelor’s degree will earn approximately \$1 million more than those without any postsecondary education, [and] are... also far less likely to face unemployment” (New Federal Guidance, 2016, para. 1).

However, as Engstrom & Tinto stated in 2008, “Access without support is not opportunity,” which remains true for students today. Access to a college education alone does not mean equitable opportunities. Today the cost of a college education continues to rise, as college students work more hours than ever before to try to meet the gap in their ability to pay for school. The “Learning While Earning: The New Normal” report stated that more than 40% of undergraduate students work at least 30 hours each week and a quarter of all working students are both working and enrolled full time (Carnevale, Smith, Melton, & Price, 2015). With this changing landscape, past and present philosophies and strategies of education, training, and development - including approaches to student employment and opportunities for student development - no longer meet the realities of the student population and experiences of today. Now is the time for us as student affairs practitioners to respond to this gap.

Our opportunity is through student employment as a leadership development experience. Our educational institutions are poised to respond to these changing circumstances and to reimagine the value and the impact possible while developing students through this journey. We must carefully examine the pathways laid out to prepare stu-

dents for graduation and successful entry into the workforce. Pathways must include interventions to support and retain students and to prepare them to navigate the world of work. To do this, both academic and student affairs practitioners will need to collaborate across disciplines, units, and departments, to think differently about how students learn, grow, and develop. The first step as practitioners is to learn more about the landscape of higher education, how the field is poised to respond to these challenges, and what and how interventions can be designed to serve students.

## THE LANDSCAPE OF AND FOR STUDENTS

The Lumina Foundation (2017) found that 64% of college students work and 40% of those employed work full time. The Student Employment National Research Study (2018) reports that number to be an average of 70-80% of full-time students who are employed either on or off-campus. The amount and kind of work a student must do in college shapes their experience. Kruger and Peck (2017) write, “It stands to reason that students who must work more hours are more likely to receive less financial support from their families and, thus, are more economically disadvantaged. It seems plausible that students who come from lower-income families face challenges that their wealthier peers do not” (p. xxvi). Tinto explains, “. . . employment not only limits the time one has for academic studies, it also severely limits one’s opportunities for interaction with other students and faculty. As a consequence, one’s social integration, as well as one’s academic performance, suffers” (1993, p. 269).

Challenges for underrepresented students are documented and complicate the process of navigating college. This group often works and works more hours during their time in school. Students working more hours are also more likely to be first-generation college students (Terenzini, et al., 1996). How does employment for this group hold the promise of a developmental experience? Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt (2010) explain the challenges of ensuring access to opportunities in college: many colleges claim to provide high-quality learning environments for their students. As evidence, schools point to educationally enriching opportunities they make available, such as honors programs, co-curricular leadership development programs, and collaboration with faculty members on research. Too often, however, these experiences are coincidental or efforts on the part of students themselves rather than intentional institutional intervention. For every student who has such an experience, others exist who may not connect in meaningful ways with their teachers or their peers, or take advantage of learning opportunities. As a result, many students leave school prematurely or put little effort into their learning effectively falling short of benefiting from college to the extent they should.

In addition to increasing numbers of students working throughout college, demographics of the college-going population in the U.S. is shifting. Today, 42% of college students are students of color, 9% are first-generation immigrants to the U.S., and 37% are 25 or older (The State of Higher Education, 2018). Beyond shifting demographics, the field knows all too well that the cost of higher education has increased and the number of students graduating with college debt has grown. One study showed that most students who graduate with a bachelor’s degree will have debt with the heaviest debt carried by black students. Average loan debt for graduates is \$30,100.00 (Lumina Foundation for Education, Goal 2025, 2017).

Through circumstances, demographics, access, and financial change, the landscape has shifted and so have the attitudes of college-going students and families. The family focus now is on earning potential and post-graduation employment (The State of Higher Education, 2018). Through interventions in practices with student employment higher education practitioners can focus attention on the support, development, persistence, and matriculation of underrepresented students. The field has already embedded many of these practices in classrooms and programs. Now the field must look to things like high impact practices for learning and leadership development to also wrap around our employment efforts. Simply put, educators in this field must do more to make student employment a worthwhile educational experience.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, SKILLS, AND SERVICES FOR TODAY

In a sea of opportunities that can benefit students, which ones should we highlight for underrepresented working

students? With limited time, it makes sense to provide the highest return on their investment of time. The National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE), a tool to report on college student engagement, cites High Impact Practices (HIPs) as a tool for measuring high levels of student learning and development and increasing the likelihood of persistence, graduation, and employment (National Survey for Student Engagement, 2018). High impact experiences offer students the opportunity to develop higher-order thinking skills, improve persistence and academic performance and “demand that students devote considerable amounts of time and effort to purposeful tasks” (Kuh, 2008, p. 14). With so much time dedicated to paying for college, this may be a luxury that many students, particularly historically underrepresented groups, cannot afford. Engaging student employment as leadership development includes treating it as a high impact practice – something this field already understands well. Finley & McNair called on institutions and practitioners to do just that. Their 2013 study demonstrated the connections between high impact practices, student engagement, and retention across different underrepresented groups. Their report, *Assessing Underserved Students’ Engagement in High Impact Practices* concluded that practitioners and institutions should work alongside students across their time not just in their first and final years to fully engage the benefits of these practices in co-curriculum (Finley & McNair, 2013).

In 2019 NASPA centered their annual conference on underserved students and their engagement, development, and learning on college campuses. Historically underrepresented college students need transformative experiences in college but tend to have less access to these kinds of experiences (Westbrook, 2017). Student employment can fill this important gap. In order to develop a workforce-ready graduate who is prepared to respond to the unique challenges of employment in the 21st century, skills connected to teamwork, diversity, and working in a global marketplace should be honed (Hovland & Schneider, 2011). Organizations like the Lumina Foundation call on colleges and universities to change their approaches to students in and beyond the classroom to match the changing demographics, goals, and aspirations of the new college student.

Since students already “devote considerable time” to their employment on and off-campus, the prospect of creating transformative learning could be as simple as improving the quality of student employment as a learning experience (Kuh, 2008, p. 14). Peck and Callahan (2019) write, “Imagine the impact of applying the conditions of high-impact experiences to students’ employment. How would these programs be different if students got frequent feedback about their performance? How might students benefit from the kinds of campus jobs that allow them to “devote considerable time” to “purposeful tasks” (p. 14). What if both their student employment and their leadership programs were situated within an “academically challenging curriculum that appropriately infuses opportunities for active, collaborative learning” (p. 17)? Higher education institutions can adjust to serve and prepare historically underrepresented and first-generation students by intentionally building wrap-around services through employment on and off campus. Employment on campus can be focused on work experiences that invite, develop, and retain underrepresented students, through aligning the goals of the workplace with student development, leadership development, and High Impact Practices. Employment off-campus can be bolstered by interventions for reflection, development, and sense-making for the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. These interventions are more than just a good idea. To reimagine how higher education develops professionals and underserved students, in particular, is a moral imperative of the profession. Economically disadvantaged students deserve access to an integrative and holistic education. A new approach to supporting and developing underrepresented students is needed. Enhancing student employment can provide a vital context for this reimagining.

## CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AT WORK

Student employment is an opportunity for campuses to step forward and focus on bridging academic and student affairs worlds to support underrepresented students. This bridging takes place through an expressed focus on serving, affirming, and organizing for the goals and needs of diverse students. Diversity, as defined by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), is “engagement across racial and ethnic lines comprised of a broad and varied set of activities and initiatives” (p.4). However, diversity that only brings together people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, or increases compositional diversity, is not enough to create rich learning environments. Instead, “...campuses must provide stimulating courses covering historical, cultural, and social bases of diversity and community, and must create additional opportunities for students to interact across racial

and other social differences” (Milem, Chang, Antonio, 2005. p. 9). Through employment, student development can be designed to do just that through an intersectional approach to learning. Kuh’s (2008) High Impact Practices mention as a condition of this work courses and experiences through which students, “explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own.”

Tools in the field are available that are intersectional, culturally relevant, and align the development of student employees with leadership learning goals. Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning, for instance, takes a critical lens to develop leadership capacity and is based on student development models. With these and new tools, practitioners as educators must transform the landscape of higher education to welcome diverse learners and to embed a commitment to diversity in the institutional DNA (Ahmed, 2012). For practitioners working to develop students through employment this means, “... diversity and inclusion efforts move beyond numbers of students or numbers of programs as end goals. Instead, they are multilayered processes through which we achieve excellence in learning; research and teaching; student development; local and global community engagement; workforce development; and more” (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). The environment of student employment is where this kind of shift and intersectional approach can and should take place. Student employment can welcome and seek out diverse and underrepresented students. Practitioners can build learning outcomes associated with work that speaks to goals of citizenship, diversity, and intercultural learning. Universities can respond to this call by organizing on-campus student employment through the lens of leadership development, which by extension prepares students to be leaders not only in their chosen profession but holistically within their communities.

An intentional approach for students and from practitioners and universities requires a nuanced discussion about the opportunities and needs of underrepresented students on college campuses (Bertrand Jones, Guthrie, & Osteen, 2016). Historically, the increased need for underrepresented students to work while in college has meant less opportunity for leadership development and student experiences. Beyond this disparity in access, there is an opportunity for student affairs practitioners through student employment. Employment can become a lever through which opportunities for intercultural learning, a deep culture of engagement, and honoring diversity through the design of leadership development practices happens. In this process practitioners and institutions emerge as partners who support underrepresented student leadership development (Bertrand Jones, Guthrie, & Osteen, 2016). Leadership studies and student affairs have offered pathways forward to engage underrepresented groups, to enhance the development of leadership skills and abilities through employment, and to develop students as leaders and as employees with leadership identities (Priest & Clegorne, 2015; Seemiller, 2013). These efforts along with continued discussion of how tools can be designed and used, and the rallying call from practitioners and universities to support student employment as leadership development, will shape preparation of underrepresented students for professional work.

To demonstrate this, researchers seek measures beyond retention and GPA as markers for the value of student employment (Riggert, Boyle, Petrosko, Ash, & Rude-Parkins, 2006). Markers can include things like leadership development and leadership identity development, both pathways to prepare students for work, community, and the world. According to Guthrie, Bertrand Jones, Osteen, & Hu leadership identity is how students conceive of themselves as leaders and leadership capacity is how students learn and practices the skills and behaviors of leadership (2013). Programs around the country have started to link leadership development and skill development in the day-to-day work of student employees. Drawing on models like the Leadership Identity Development Model (Komives, Longersbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006), the C3 Model (Peck & Preston, 2018) and the 2016 NACE career readiness skills the field has frameworks through which any campus employer can align leadership development, skills, and culturally relevant development for employees. Across these models, and with an eye toward supporting underrepresented students through employment, higher education practitioners can pull from leadership studies and student affairs for specific guidance on how to design these interventions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

With all of this to pull from, now we, the higher education and student affairs practitioners, must consider how to infuse employment preparation practices in our work with students employed on and off campus. Salisbury, Pas-



CALLAHAN, PECK, & BOLDEN. THE SUPERSTUDENT HAS BEEN CONSIDERED A DILEMMA OF THE STUDENT OF THE EXPERIENCE necessary for success in the workforce and that is what the faculty needs of the student (2012). In our relationships, the nature of that relationship, but that is what the student needs to take care of. We have responsibility that falls from the fields of leadership, the holistic student development, and long affairs, and we begin to wrap activities in the development of higher education with an emphasis on how purposefully designing campus activities advance desirable learning and developmental outcomes for students.

### Infuse leadership development into student employment

Leadership development on college campuses has evolved over the past three decades. Work from leadership and student affairs professionals explain it as a practice that unfolds with others through daily processes, includes leaders and followers, is situated by context, and is understood as a relationship in which change is a constant (Peck & Callahan, 2019; Komives, Lucas, McMahon, 2013; Raelin, 2016). Student employees have the ideal opportunity to develop their interests leading to a plethora of formal and informal organizations and experiences that include roles that are, for example, intellectual, social, recreational, cultural, political, humanitarian, and spiritual. Arminio (2015) notes one of the first such organizations was the Oxford Union, founded in 1823 to bring students together to debate the issues of the day, at eventually expanded to engage students in other interests including hobbies, literature, poetry, and various recreational activities (Arminio). In this model, training and assessment move from performance-based to developmental. Employees learn how to answer phones and make copies in addition to practicing the skills of leadership through relationship building, decision making, and more.

When practitioners design on-campus student employment through this lens, the effort to align leadership development has begun. The opportunities and needs of underrepresented students on college campuses are then central to discussions about how universities can expand opportunities for intercultural learning and deepen a culture of engagement.

Allen, K. E., Jullian, F. H., Stern, C. M., Walborn, N. C., & Blackstone, C. (1987). *Future perfect: A guide for professional development and competence*. Columbia, SC: National Association of Campus Activities Education Foundation. Providing a rich set of experiences for on-campus employment is one way to embed co-curricular learning experiences and high impact practices through employment. An intercultural and intersectional approach to learning and development (W. 2016) centers institutions and students as first identities. Practitioners and institutions more ready for students and advances institutional and individual leadership development goals (Ahmed, 2012; Bertrand Jones, Guthrie, & Osteen, 2016; Whitley, Benson, & Wesaw, n.d.). With this approach, leadership development is infused into the daily practices of student employment. Such infusion can accompany goal setting, developmental training and evaluation, and reflection. Infusing leadership development into student employment is a first step to prepare students to compete and lead in an ever-changing workforce. (Gott, Bauer, & Long, 2019; Peck & Preston, 2018; Priest & Clegorne, 2015).

### Embed reflective activity into student employment

Reflective practice is a tool to make sense of leadership learning, intercultural development, and career readiness skills. The power of reflection to generate, deepen, and document student learning is key to making sense of critical issues that emerge through curricular and co-curricular learning (Ash & Clayton, 2009). Student employment offers a rich opportunity for learning through its experiential nature. Reflection is a regular practice in student employment to support learning. Hansen (2019) outlines the fertile ground in student employment for development through the work with Iowa GROW (Guided Reflection on Work). Iowa GROW has mapped a learning process to connect tasks and skills through practice and process based on Yelon's MASS model of learning. This process includes a set of standard questions that student employees respond to throughout their work. Hansen offers examples of embedded reflection in student employment, having intentionally designed reflections on learning through practice (2019). Designing meaningful reflection requires higher education practitioners to connect with partners in the workforce and to understand what skills, practices, and behaviors are desirable. Supervisors and administrators can: 1) push students to excel beyond identified competency levels, 2) ask questions to promote reflection, 2) promote a culture of learning, and 4) be explicit about the transferrable skills and competencies students can develop to support their career readiness (Hansen, 2019).

### Provide frequent feedback to students about their skills and performance

Practitioners can establish regular, formal and informal, practices of sharing feedback to normalize continuous

improvement and feedback. Such sharing requires a plan for providing feedback, including what and how it is shared. Our field has resources to design meaningful evaluations to develop students through employment. Feedback can be directed toward a set of skills or competencies for employment or a Leadership-as-Practice (LAP) orientation to learning and development. Supervisors can make the outcomes explicit drawing on resources like the NACE competencies for career readiness (2017) and Seemiller's (2013) leadership competencies (Hernandez & Smith, 2019). These are tools for identifying developmental skills that employees can work toward and that supervisors can design feedback around. A LAP approach goes beyond this, integrating leadership identity, practice, and mindset into common work and extending competencies to practices (Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008). Additionally, coaching is one practice through which feedback rooted in growth and development can be approached (Priest, Kliever, Hornung, & Youngblood, 2018; Hernandez & Smith, 2019).

Beyond feedback, the Leadership Identity Development Model (LID) highlights the significant impact of adult and peer influences on the development of leadership identity including in the employment setting (Komives, et al., 2005). Practitioners' intentional support, mentorship, and engagement with employees create an environment where feedback is a regular and expected part of employment and associated leadership development practice. Gott, Bauer, & Long (2019) state that "Supervisors establish intentional relationships to address and engage the entire person, removing limitations to engagement and their [the employees] role in the organization." Development of this intentional relationship requires that feedback become regular and rooted in clear goals. The current NASPA research agenda suggests that beyond individualized development, institutions ought to have a collective framework that guides what students should be learning across jobs at the institution (McClellan, Creagar, & Savoca, 2018).

### **Provide resources for students employed off-campus**

With a higher percentage of underrepresented students working off-campus deepening practices of accessibility and equity, including intercultural development, must include questions about how to develop and engage groups on and off campus. A 2012 study by Salisbury, et al. found that leadership development through employment is significantly higher for students working off-campus. More research must be done regarding the relationship between where students work (on or off campus) and their overall success in college, as well as how leadership development is defined in these work experiences. In 2008, a study shed light on the impact that employment - on and off campus - has on students' grades. The study found that students employed on campus have a more positive indirect relationship between the number of hours worked and their grades than students who worked off-campus (Pike, Kuh & Massa-McKinley, 2008). With this knowledge, practitioners interested in bolstering student leadership development and career-readiness can deepen student learning and development and identify ways that these practices are incorporated for off-campus employment. Such practices represent a key opportunity for innovation between a university campus and surrounding businesses that employ students. In a 2019 issue of *New Directions for Student Leadership*, Preston cited tools like the C3 Model to align leadership and professional development. Preston indicated that best practices in on-campus employment connect to extending resources to students employed off-campus as well. Reflection, connecting learning goals and objectives with work, and developmentally evaluating the performance of the employees are all steps campuses can take in working with local employers to support students in their leadership development (Preston, 2019). Faculty working with community-engaged scholarship, service-learning pedagogies, extension specialists, and others are great examples of how to work with community partners to develop reciprocal relationships. Student Affairs professionals can advance this work becoming resources to local employers and providing wrap-around services to deepen learning and development.

### **Foster culturally relevant "polish" and eliminate hegemonic constructs**

Finally, practitioners must focus on preparing employees for professional life and do so without perpetuating hegemonic constructs of what it means to be "professional." Such preparation requires deeper understanding of what a "culturally relevant polish" looks like and the intentional release of practices that perpetuate hegemony. Practitioners first ought to become aware of their assumptions, biases, and values and work to understand the experiences and worldviews of others. Awareness occurs through being informed by a diversity of cultural groups and seeking additional opportunities to learn. Practitioners can develop culturally relevant strategies to intervene, mentor, support, and engage with employees from a diversity of cultural identities, backgrounds, and experiences

(Pope, Reynolds & Mueller 2019; Watt, 2007). Through understanding gaps in knowledge, and gaining awareness of what information and knowledge one might never fully grasp, practitioners begin to understand their identities as cultural beings (Watt, 2007). Tools like the intercultural development continuum and intercultural development coaching can shed light on personal intercultural development and how to develop competency in this skill (Hammer & Bennett, 2012).

In starting with their own identities, practitioners can develop a workplace that welcomes and honors diverse ways of knowing, being, and doing, modeling what a professional practice looks like that seeks out and values that diversity. Practitioners may serve students by dismissing current orientations of what “professional” means. Reframing will require intentional reflection on how majority practices have served and when they have served to separate, to denigrate, to supersede other cultural practices. Finally, beyond this personal reflection, further research from practitioners and scholars alike on how tools like the HIPs and other engagement and student success models impact students across underrepresented groups are needed to advance the field. The 2016 report from the U.S. Department of Education effectively summarized what is known about supporting underrepresented students in higher education including how student success initiatives impact students. Among the list of factors contributing to student success is support beyond the classroom and inclusive campus practices (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This work can and must happen in student employment.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The landscape of higher education has changed. While more students, including underrepresented students, have access to college, that access comes with limitations. The need to work, often fulltime to pay for school, can reduce the learning and development opportunities available to students, especially in underrepresented groups. However, work can be one of the most powerful developmental experiences a student has. To prepare students well for life as a professional post-graduation, higher education practitioners must catalyze learning and development by incorporating leadership development tools in employment. The fields of student development and leadership studies have already offered pathways forward. Reimagining how higher education develops professionals with a focus on underserved students is a moral imperative of the profession. Now is the time to examine practices and step forward to meet that imperative stepping proudly into the new landscape and serving students.

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