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Allies in Education

A Profile of:

**Off Campus Work/Study Program
(Careers in the Classroom)
St. Louis, Missouri**

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Allies in Education

A Profile of:

Off Campus Work/Study Program (Careers in the Classroom) St. Louis, Missouri

by Phyllis Snyder and Sheila Rosenblum

September 1987

THE SCHOOL/BUSINESS COLLABORATIONS STUDY

This profile of the Off-Campus Work Study Program is part of an assessment by Public/Private Ventures of partnerships between business and education. The three-year study was funded by The CIGNA Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, The Exxon Education Foundation, The IBM Corporation, The Pew Memorial Trust, and The Rockefeller Foundation. The assessment addressed three basic issues:

- o What is the nature of school/business collaborations? What achievements are expected?
- o What types of youth are served by these collaborative efforts?
- o What role does business play in the collaborations? How did business get involved? Why does it continue to be involved?

Public/Private Ventures has published Allies in Education: Schools and Businesses Working Together for At-Risk Youth, a two-volume report that probes these central questions. Profiles of nine different partnerships assessed as part of this project are included in the report's second volume.

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Public/Private Ventures is a not-for-profit corporation that designs, manages and evaluates social policy initiatives designed to help disadvantaged people, especially youth, become productively employed and self-sufficient.

To achieve that goal, P/PV works with schools, government, employment and training organizations, community-based agencies, foundations and business in a variety of ways:

- o We design new strategies to remedy such pressing problems as the high dropout rate, illiteracy and youth unemployment.
- o We evaluate the effectiveness of programs designed to confront these problems.
- o We conduct multisite national demonstrations to rigorously test promising new solutions.
- o We help the public and private sectors replicate initiatives that have proven effective.

From all our work, we distill the best practices and most significant research findings, and actively promote their use in the development of sound public policy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Off Campus Work/Study Program, also known as Careers in the Classroom, is a 17-year-old program administered through the vocational education division of the St. Louis Public School system. A unique cooperative venture with private industry, the program serves between 150 and 200 high school seniors in a work/study program conducted entirely in a business or at a work-site. Six different work or program sites are sponsored by either a single corporation or group of businesses in the same industry. At the site, students spend half a day in regular school classes, taught by St. Louis public school teachers, completing their graduation requirements and preparing for employment. For the remainder of the day, students do part-time paid work under the supervision of regular employees and teacher coordinators.

The program was designed and implemented by the school district with the support of the Danforth Foundation and the assistance of private sector representatives interested in addressing the employment-readiness needs of entry-level job applicants. The program's goal is to increase the employability of St. Louis youth by providing supervised work experience and exposure to careers. The program emphasizes preemployment skills and appropriate work behavior by reinforcing the connection between basic skills competence and the use of these skills in the workplace.

The program does not target a special population of students though participants must have completed enough graduation requirements to be classified as seniors. Nor are students required to have been enrolled in a vocational education program. The program tends to attract/recruit two types of students: those who have become impatient with school, are ready to make the transition to work, and either want or need encouragement to graduate (including those with good records); and those not doing well in school and whom guidance counselors feel might do better in a more business-like, nontraditional school environment.

The St. Louis Off Campus Work/Study Program displays several distinctive features:

- o It was an early entrant in a field where many "partnership programs" are relatively new;
- o It is administered by the school district, rather than a business or intermediary organization;
- o It is part of the vocational education system, but it differs from the traditional co-op work/study program;

- o It is not targeted but attracts mostly minority and many disadvantaged students;
- o It has had the continuing participation of a number of major businesses or industries; and
- o It has had to adapt to a number of changes in both the educational and business environments, including desegregation and changing economic conditions.

For these reasons it was felt that valuable lessons could be learned from the St. Louis experience.

This profile will describe the program's goals and history; its operation, management and outcomes during the 1984-85 school year; and its changes over time. It will also present some lessons learned from an examination of this program. Information for the profile was collected during two visits, totalling five days, to St. Louis in the spring of 1985. Interviews were conducted with Peter Rein, manager of the program; the current Superintendent of Schools and Associate Superintendent; three company coordinators; five teachers and a sample of students. Additional information was gained from worksite and classroom observations and review of documentary materials.

II. HISTORY AND CONTEXT

PROGRAM HISTORY

The development and evolution of the Off Campus Work/Study Program was heavily influenced by an entrepreneurial and innovative Superintendent of schools, the presence in St. Louis of an interested foundation willing to lend support and two corporations with a history of civic involvement, and the assignment of a competent, committed manager to coordinate the program.

The program began in 1968. At that time, Dr. William Kottmeyer, Superintendent of the St. Louis Public Schools, was interested in developing a new work/study program for high school seniors. He worked to develop a program that would increase their exposure to careers and employment opportunities in the St. Louis area and improve their preparation for the world of work. As a vehicle, he envisioned a unique cooperative venture between the school system and the private sector--one that would exceed the requirements of federal guidelines for a vocational education, co-op program.

The superintendent had a close relationship with the Danforth Foundation; based in St. Louis, it traditionally allocates 15 percent of its grants to local projects. He interested the foundation in his vision and Danforth awarded a small planning grant to the school district to fund the start-up of an innovative work/study program. Not only did Danforth funding assist program start-up, but the foundation's involvement was instrumental in securing private sector participation.

St. Louis does not have a long history of extensive business involvement in the schools. For many years, an organization called Civic Progress, a small group of Chief Executive Officers of major corporations in St. Louis, has served as a clearinghouse for the business community's ventures in community services. Civic Progress' interest in community affairs did not extend to the schools until recent years; when the Off Campus Work/Study Program began, there was no immediately identifiable business group with which the schools could work.

The Danforth Foundation was able to assist in creating appropriate linkages. Two St. Louis companies, Ralston-Purina and Stix Baer Fuller, agreed to participate and meet the program requirements. Each agreed to provide classroom space and jobs for about 15 students during the first year. The wages of those at Stix Baer were subsidized by the program; Ralston-Purina paid its student wages.

Enlisting Ralston-Purina was fortuitous, not only because of the company's strong standing in the community, but also because of

the choice of Mablean Perkins as the company coordinator for the program. She has remained in the company and with the program since its inception, and during the 1984-85 school year, she spent about 40 percent of her time on program-related activities.

Private sector participation has changed over the years. At one point, there were as many as 11 corporate participants. Now there are five--Ralston-Purina, Blue Cross, the American Institute of Banking (representing multiple banks), McGraw-Hill, and local Shell Oil and Amoco service stations--and one program at City Hall. Over the years, companies left the program for several reasons, most significantly the loss of wage subsidies after the planning years and a declining economy in the St. Louis area that resulted in fewer jobs for youth at certain worksites. Dissatisfaction with the program was not specifically cited as a reason for withdrawal.

PROGRAM CONTEXT

The Off Campus Work/Study Program has been affected by several changes in its school district and community context: court-ordered desegregation, declining enrollment (due in part to white flight), increasing enrollment in an already strong parochial and private school system, and an economic slump in the 1970s.

When the program began in 1968, the size of the St. Louis Public School system was double its current enrollment of 57,000. (One person interviewed commented that in the 1970s, St. Louis had the dubious distinction of being the city that was losing population most rapidly.) The district faced court-ordered desegregation in 1981 and is continuing to work out the specifications of a court-ordered desegregation plan.

The current desegregation plan encompasses 23 school districts located in the city and county, and provides for voluntary interchange of the city's black students and the county's white students. An extensive network of magnet schools within the city has been designed to attract the brightest and most motivated students from both city and county.

The desegregation agreement has affected recruitment and enrollment in the Work/Study program in two ways. Since the vocational education court decree required that a specific number of slots in the banking program be reserved for white students, who were harder to recruit, the spaces could not be filled by interested and eligible black students. In addition, the district provided new and innovative opportunities for all students, and eligible students were able to choose from many competing alternatives to this program.

The current superintendent, Dr. Jerome Jones, is the fourth person to serve as superintendent since the beginning of the Off Campus Work/Study Program. Dr. Jones was recruited from outside the district and became superintendent in 1983. He is still cultivating relationships with both the business community and within the school system. Many of his contacts with the business community are in the context of the local Partnership Program (Adopt-a-School) or other special projects. The Work/Study Program is considered only one of several vocational education offerings and is not as prominent in St. Louis as it is in the wider education and training community.

III. PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND ROLES

The Off Campus Work/Study Program is administered in the vocational education division of the St. Louis Public Schools. Peter Rein is manager of the program, and has been its driving force in the school district for many years. From his central coordinating office at the Fallon Technical Center, Rein coordinates the six different Off Campus programs. Among his responsibilities are recruiting employers and job slots, recruiting students, and placing students in programs and sometimes in specific jobs. The program is further structured around the following roles:

- o A company or industry coordinator at each of the program sites. The coordinator represents the company's or industry's curriculum needs and serves as a liaison to the personnel office that develops jobs and work stations to which the students are assigned. The extent of a company coordinator's involvement varies from one location to another.
- o Teachers for each of the programs. The teachers are employees of the school district. They provide instruction in English and math to meet graduation requirements, preemployment skills such as job-seeking and appropriate work behavior, and technical/vocational skills such as typing, word processing and calculating appropriate to the local industry. The teachers also visit and check students' on-the-job performance, and they serve as liaison with job supervisors to help deal with any problems that emerge during the course of the students' employment.

The teachers in each of the programs play a large role in determining the curriculum and teaching strategies for their classes. For example, teachers at the Banking Institute use a variety of techniques, such as role-playing, to stress oral communication. Teachers in some programs work closely with the company coordinator to identify shortcomings and to improve curriculum. Ralston-Purina has strengthened the focus on communication skills and has offered to provide company speakers to convey to students the work world's demands.

- o Job supervisors. They serve as direct supervisors of youth on the job; some are assigned to this role, and some volunteer to supervise.
- o Guidance counselors within the high schools. As part of the process to recruit students to participate in the program, Rein solicits the counselor's cooperation in recruiting and referring students.

Overall, there is a clear division of labor in the structure and management of the program. The school district runs the program and is in charge of its formal education elements, the academic curriculum and the recruitment of students. Businesses provide jobs and work supervision. Joint decision-making may occur in planning curriculum to develop employability and placing of students in particular jobs. Sometimes employers want to interview students, but often they rely on Rein to make judgments about appropriate placements, based on counselor's recommendations, and the preferences and skills of the students.

MOTIVATION FOR BUSINESS PARTICIPATION

As is the case with many partnership programs in which the primary role of business is to provide paid employment for youth, the majority of participating businesses are service industries. These businesses typically have many entry-level jobs that can be filled by high school seniors, and they seek to promote their services to the public through participation in community service activities. Participation in an employment and training program is also viewed as a community contribution.

Nonprofit corporations, such as Blue Cross, cannot make monetary contributions to the community, and therefore contribute to the life of the city in other ways. A program such as Careers in the Classroom offers such an alternative opportunity to do so.

Although the program benefits the companies by screening student workers, sharing in their supervision and serving as a source of permanent employees, management's initial willingness to participate stems largely from a sense of civic responsibility. Only later, when a firm tallies the number of student employees that became permanent hires, does the economic benefit become evident, though it is rarely acknowledged.

MOTIVATION FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION

From the school district's perspective, the aim of the program has been to help students successfully enter the workplace. From

the students' perspective, the main incentive to participate seems to be having a job. For many, the opportunity to leave the traditional school setting a year early, gain work experience and still graduate also makes the program attractive. The small size of each program appears to be another selling point for many participants.

IV. KEY FEATURES: THE PROGRAM IN ACTION

The program varies from site to site in atmosphere, the styles and experiences of the staff and the needs of industry. But there are key components common to all: formal on-site classes and the paid work experience.

THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Program participants are high school seniors. During the regular school year, students have four class periods between 8:30 a.m. and 12:15 p.m. One function of the educational program is to provide the required social studies and the fourth year of English. In all the programs except the one conducted at service stations, office skills are taught in a double period of business practice. All the programs also emphasize developing employability skills such as resume writing, interviewing, verbal communication and appropriate work behavior.

The reinforcement of employability skills is facilitated by locating classes in a place of business. Youth learn early in the school year that they are expected to conform to the norms of the workplace. In the case of the banking program, classes are held at the American Institute of Banking; from there students go to one of several banks for their afternoon jobs. Classes in the service stations program are held in a trailer. Students work at one of several participating stations in the afternoon.

At all work locations, students dress and look like their fellow workers, rather than like typical high school students. This is particularly noticeable for the banking students who dress in businesslike attire. The relationship of basic skills to employability skills is also emphasized as the two are integrated in academic classes. For example, writing assignments for English classes are often in the form of business letters, applications, job descriptions, etc.

A special feature of the instructional component is the high level of interest shown by the teachers and the relationships they frequently form with their students. Teachers like teaching in the program for several reasons: the pupil/teacher ratio is lower than in the regular high school classroom; students are generally motivated; and teachers have an opportunity to be in a business environment--one that is different from the regular high school. Less time is wasted, making for a more efficient and effective classroom experience.

One disadvantage of holding classes at a business location is that students are not included in school activities and the special features associated with the senior year of high school.

Students do, however, graduate with their home school and are encouraged to participate in special senior activities. After classes, students eat lunch in the company cafeteria (if one exists) and then report to their jobs.

THE WORK EXPERIENCE

Paid work experience is a fundamental part of the program, and it is the major attraction for students who work 20 hours a week or more. Most are paid minimum wage, though wages vary from company to company. At the Federal Reserve Bank, students are given raises when salaries of all other employees are raised.

The jobs are entry-level. Most are white collar office jobs in the service industries, the exception being those in the service station program. We observed that most of the tasks performed by students at the Federal Reserve Bank, Blue Cross and Ralston-Purina involved such office skills as filing, answering the telephone, entering data, and making calculations. Ralston-Purina also offers a number of laboratory jobs for students who are interested in science and have taken science courses. According to supervisors interviewed at Ralston-Purina, fewer students accepted into the program in recent years have been qualified for these openings.

All of the jobs that were observed appear to provide good learning experiences. Equally important, students were dispersed around the job sites and seemed to be integrated into the regular work force. They were hard to identify unless pointed out by the coordinator.

Students were supervised at the job by regular employees, many of whom volunteer for these assignments or request student workers. Training for supervision is usually provided by the company coordinators, who also organize a program orientation each year. Classroom teachers talk periodically with the work supervisor about the students' performances, and tend to use problems or weaknesses as a basis for class discussion of business practice. Supervisors interviewed at several worksites agreed that students generally become productive workers after a short period of training.

One criticism has been that students are not always prepared to begin work in the fall. As a result, Ralston-Purina and Blue Cross have initiated orientation classes for the students in the summer prior to their beginning employment. Initiated two years ago, these classes take place three days a week from 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. during an eight-week period. In the banking program, students are assigned to jobs and begin work during the summer prior to their senior year. The lack of available support from teachers and classes during the summer has sometimes resulted in

problems related to work-appropriate behavior that are not faced during the school year.

Mentoring is not specifically required of supervisors in the program, but, as a result of the close relationship that often develops between students and supervisors on the job, respondents mentioned that many students discuss career plans and decisions with their supervisors and use them as sources of information and assistance. Supervisors and company coordinators who were interviewed appeared to know the students well and to have developed a sincere interest in them.

V. THE STUDENTS IN THE PROGRAM

This program is not targeted to youth most at risk of dropping out of school, in large part because that population would not be hired by the companies in the program. The youth who enter the program are primarily average students who have achieved passing grades and remained in school, but who often lack career goals and the skills to obtain good jobs when they graduate from high school.

Most of the students who apply and are accepted are not in the Vocational Education track; many of the students in that track have already been placed in a job in the co-op program. The majority of the students in the Off Campus Program are either in the general or college preparatory track. By the end of their junior year, some have lost interest in school, though they still attend. Students are attracted to this program because they are seeking work experience either to help them decide what to do after high school, or because it makes the last year in high school different, and therefore special. Most of the students in the program are minorities, and given the socioeconomic situation of St. Louis, many are probably poor. However, based on our observations, many of the students had good grades and probably chose the program because they were bored with the regular school program.

In the 1984-85 school year, 145 youth participated in the program, distributed across the six programs as follows:

- o 34 at Ralston-Purina;
- o 12 at Blue Cross;
- o 20 at St. Louis City Hall;
- o 20 at McGraw-Hill;
- o 24 at the American Institute of Banking; and
- o 34 in the service station program.

RECRUITMENT

Recruitment is conducted largely by the program manager, Peter Rein, with the cooperation of guidance counselors in the area high schools. Students are recruited at the beginning of the second semester of their junior year. Counselors are responsible for informing students about the program and validating eligibility of the students who apply.

During the first 10 years of the program, the success of the recruitment was helped by the relationship that Rein had developed with the guidance counselors, who individually encouraged students whom they considered suitable candidates. However, the changes in the school district that have resulted from the deseg-

regation order have affected the recruitment process. The county schools, whose students are eligible for this as well as other programs in the district, are much more geographically dispersed, so it is difficult for Rein to visit counselors to establish important personal contacts and relationships. Thus, the counselors are not as knowledgeable about the program and do not promote it as well.

The number of participants has diminished, from a high of 250 youth to a 1984-1985 size of 145 students. It has become more difficult for the program to recruit enough students to fill available slots. Even at Ralston-Purina, considered one of the most desirable companies, it is harder to find 40 students qualified to fill available slots. Many of the top minority students, who formerly participated because of the quality of the jobs, now attend programs in the county schools or one of the magnet programs. It is also more difficult to attract white students from the county schools, though racial balance is required by court order.

Rein often takes former students with him to promote the program in the high schools. Currently, the companies play no direct role in the recruitment process. However, Ms. Perkins of Ralston-Purina thought that using company representatives to help with the recruitment process might generate more attention and excitement.

VI. PROGRAM COSTS

The operation and management of the Off Campus Work/Study Program incurs direct costs to the school district and both direct and indirect costs to business.

The school district pays for the full-time management by Peter Rein and his secretary and the salaries of teachers in the program. Although not directly charged to this program, the time of the guidance counselors in the high schools and their involvement in recruiting is a cost of the program.

Employers provide student salaries, the released time of the company coordinator, the employees to train and supervise students on the job, and the space for the classrooms. Although the last component differentiates this program from other work/study or co-op programs where there is no requirement that students attend classes at the worksite, business plays little or no role in the classroom.

The allocation of these costs within the company budgets varies from company to company. In some cases, the entire cost of the program (including student wages) is taken out of the budget of the personnel or human services office, where the company coordinator often works. In other companies, individual departments that wish to hire students must bear the cost of the students' wages.

VII. PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Outcomes of a program such as this can be viewed from a variety of perspectives: benefits to youth, benefits to the companies that employ them, and other unintended effects.

BENEFITS TO THE YOUTH

A 1981 article on the Off-Campus Work/Study Program printed in a monthly newspaper entitled "You and Youth" presented careful documentation of the 12-year record of this program. At the time, the annual post-graduation job placement rate was 75 percent to 80 percent with a 15 percent to 20 percent continued education rate. Attrition was less than five percent, and follow-up studies showed that graduates were advancing on the job and continuing to higher education.

Recent documentation has been less thorough. We do know that there are a total of 2,600 graduates of the program. Attrition rates are rising; in 1984-85 there was a 17 percent attrition rate. Students who remain have very positive feelings about the program. A number of banking students we interviewed felt that the program had helped them to focus their career goals and that they were better prepared to go out and look for a job. It was particularly important to them to get a "slice of reality" to find out what the world of work was like. They also valued the bonds that developed both with the teachers and with the other students because of the small size of the classes and the extra attention that this afforded them. The teachers and supervisors saw the maturation that took place during the course of the program--the youth changing from students to serious workers--as an important outcome.

Since many participants in this program already planned to seek postsecondary education, it is not immediately obvious whether participation has helped them to clarify and strengthen their goals or whether it has simply been a more interesting way for them to pass their senior year in high school. For those who desire to continue working, participation provided access to environments that might not have been available and to someone in the company with whom they can discuss career plans.

For some, participation has resulted in continued employment or a return to the company after receiving post-high school training. At each of the several worksites visited, between eight and 12 of the employees seen on a tour were former program participants, some of whom now supervise current students.

BENEFITS TO THE COMPANIES

Businesses benefit from participation in the program: they receive screened and supervised part-time workers who are simultaneously receiving on-the-job training. But companies rarely acknowledge the benefits that accrue to them when they participate in this type of program.

Ralston-Purina has been the only company to document the number of permanent hires from the program. Ralston's initial involvement came out of a sense of civic responsibility and, in fact, remained the motivating force for the first 10 years of the program. However, in 1980, Ralston got a new chief executive officer who began to look carefully at all the areas in which Ralston was exercising its social responsibility. At that point, Mablean Perkins began to quantify the benefits that the company had received from its participation in the program, and they turned out to be considerable. What was viewed as simply a contribution turned out to provide substantial economic benefits to the company.

At this point, the program is so thoroughly a part of the company that even though there had been some downturn in profits during the last few years, the company has accepted more students.

In most of the other companies that participate, there is likely a similar difference between perceptions of the CEO and the line supervisors. Management sees the program as primarily an altruistic response to the needs of the community, whereas the company coordinator or supervisors who work directly with the youth recognize the benefits that are being obtained from their work.

OTHER BENEFITS

Students remain the most direct beneficiaries of the program, but teachers in the off-campus classroom also reap benefits, including high levels of reported teacher satisfaction and professional development. They are more independent and have smaller classes than the regular high school. Their contact with business, and their experiences with curriculum development serve as important professional development activities. Some of these benefits to the school system as this new knowledge is incorporated into the larger school settings.

VIII. PROGRAM STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL/BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

The Off Campus Work/Study Program in St. Louis is a mature, established program. It is in many ways a model for developing school/business partnership programs under the aegis of vocational education--a sector generally overlooked as a base for partnerships amid expanded involvement of the private sector in education.

The program has many strengths, but also some limitations. In this final section of the profile, we summarize by highlighting the program's strengths and limitations, and the implications of those factors for the design and management of other programs.

The following are strengths of the Off Campus Work/Study Program:

- o It has strong, committed and stable direction and management;
- o It has had enduring participation of companies, and continuous participation and involvement of work supervisors in some cases over many years;
- o The program is strictly run, and the teachers and students are carefully monitored; at the same time, the programs are quite autonomous, allowing the teachers to be innovative and to generate excitement and close relationships with students;
- o This program provides extra attention to its participants; schools are often ill-equipped and too short-staffed to provide the necessary guidance that students need to plan their futures;
- o It allows students to test themselves in a new environment, while receiving guidance and support. Some students are not ready, and consequently leave the program to return to the regular school environment; and
- o The structure of the program works because it is agreeable to both school people and industry people; each has its responsibility and does not encroach upon the other. Sharing of responsibility is a major lesson from the program.

Many of these strengths are a reflection of the maturity and stability of the program. But there are also problems related to being too rooted in the past. Some of the limitations of the program are its slowness to change and adapt to a new environ-

ment, particularly one which has been affected by desegregation orders. For example:

- o The program continues to rely on old linkages and methods of recruitment;
- o It operates separately from other resources when it could capitalize on them. For example, the current initiatives of the school district to recruit private sector involvement in the schools could be coordinated with this program; in this regard, issues within the organization of the school district may inhibit such cooperation;
- o Public relations for the program within the St. Louis area are poor. For some reason, the program is better known outside of the area than within it. Improved public relations may improve recruiting efforts; and
- o The demography of the student population has changed, but the program has not adapted to serve a more disadvantaged population. The private sector is typically reluctant to hire more at-risk youth, but the structure of the program has not changed to better prepare such youth for the world of work. For example, it could design a preparatory program for younger students who would then be eligible in their senior year. Otherwise, recruitment problems will continue. Peter Rein is justifiably concerned that increased graduation requirements will decrease the number of eligible students. In order for this useful program to survive, program modifications may be in order.

The St. Louis experience demonstrates that good management, autonomy and careful division of labor can produce a stable and enduring program, one that provides important opportunities and benefits to disadvantaged youth at a crossroads in their lives. But programs must adapt and change, or they will not produce their greatest outcomes.

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