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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses Working Ahead: The National Workforce and Career Development Curriculum, a program developed by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at New Jersey's Rutgers University. The program seeks to provide practical help and skills development to those who currently are, or want to be, front-line workforce career development workers, grounding them in associated history, policy, and theory. The core skills and competencies in the Working Ahead curriculum have been researched and nationally validated by the career development field and satisfy the educational requirement for the new Global Career Development Facilitator credential. The curriculum contains 12 modules (covering 13 workforce development competencies) providing front-line workforce professionals with the skills needed to operate in a public or private One-Stop career center, educational training or job service environment. The paper concludes with specific highlights of the curriculum. (GCP)

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Working Ahead: The National One-Stop Workforce System and Career Development Facilitator Curriculum Training for Instructors

by

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Working Ahead: The National One-Stop Workforce System and Career Development Facilitator Curriculum Training for Instructors

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New Federal Legislation Creates a Need for Training and Certifying Staff

The public workforce development system is being profoundly affected by some of the most sweeping and fundamental changes ever experienced in the American approach to workforce development. These changes were set in motion during the summer of 1998, when the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) was signed into law, requiring the many publicly funded, autonomously operating agencies charged with assisting American workers to work together cooperatively.¹ On July 1, 2000, in the interest of improving services to taxpayers, these heretofore-fragmented pieces of the public workforce development “system” were mandated by law to begin operations as functionally integrated, philosophically united entities, known as One-Stop Career systems.

As a policy decision, the creation of free, universally accessible One-Stop Career systems is similar to our 19th century national commitment to free public education and the now invaluable community resource of free public libraries (nationally adopted in the 20th century). As the public placed their faith in these earlier institutions, they wanted assurance that those in charge were qualified, and able to run them effectively. It is entirely reasonable that, on the brink of the 21st century, with a broader array of citizens increasingly using One-Stop resources, they will also want such assurances about the qualifications of One-Stop staff.

Before the Workforce Investment Act, without direct attention on client services and little competition for their business, workers in the public employment system had little need for partnership skills nor, in some cases, much motivation to please the public. Through emphasis on universal access and One-Stops, WIA places a spotlight on interaction with the system’s customers and its need to provide improved service to an increasingly diverse public. One of the means to attain these goals is broad-based, systematic staff training, aimed at developing the skills necessary to succeed under the new legislation. Training aimed at customer satisfaction, in addition to compliance with regulations, is the new goal of current workforce development training, leading as well to an industry-driven and publicly recognized form of *certification* of members’ skills.

The National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc., through their affiliate, the Center for Credentialing and Education, Inc., recognized the need to improve the quality of workforce/career development facilitators or any staff working in career development settings. The Board, using research findings of the needs of workforce/career development staff,² identified 12 competencies that facilitators need to master to be effective. Competency standards were

developed with input from the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee's Career Development Training Institute (NOICC/CDTI), the National Career Development Association (NCDA), National Employment Counseling Association (NECA), the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP), and the International Association of Employment Professionals (IAPES). This process resulted in the initial establishment of a National Career Development Facilitator credential which has evolved to the Global Career Development Facilitator credential.

The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at New Jersey's Rutgers University has taken the lead in developing an educational program that provides front-line staff with the new skills and training they need to succeed—and allows them to earn a nationally respected credential that enhances their standing as professionals in the field. The Center has developed *Working Ahead: The National Workforce and Career Development Curriculum* to provide practical help and skills development to those who currently are, or want to be, front-line workforce career development workers, grounding them in associated history, policy, and theory. The core skills and competencies in the *Working Ahead* curriculum have been researched and nationally validated by the career development field, and satisfy the educational requirement for the new Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) Credential.

NECA Responds to Legislation and Workforce Needs with Training As Top Priority

America has been facing serious crises. The economic instability brought on, in part, by the tragedy of September 11, has caused many to lose their jobs, trapping those without education and training in a cycle of hardship.

To address unemployment and transition issues, the agenda of the National Employment Counseling Association (NECA) for 2002 focuses on restructuring county, state and federal workforce alliances to create more viable job opportunities. Critical to this agenda's success are initiatives in education and job training programs to help workforce professionals move workers to higher-wage, permanent jobs—not from one low-income job to another, or in some cases, to welfare.

In 2001, NECA began addressing this agenda by sponsoring the initial graduate level *Working Ahead* Workforce Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) Instructor training.

Over the last two years, NECA became involved in the recommendation and review process of the new *Working Ahead* GCDF curriculum. One aspect distinguishing *Working Ahead* from prior curriculums is a new competency focusing on current legislative programs, including One-Stop, Workforce Investment Act policies, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), as well as an increased emphasis on assessment, use of the Internet, and ethical issues with employment. The curriculum contains twelve modules (covering 13 workforce development competencies) providing front-line workforce professionals with the skills needed to operate in a public or private One-Stop career center, educational training or job service environment.

The uniqueness of the *Working Ahead* curriculum developed by Rutgers University's Heldrich Workforce Center lies with the new 13th competency, which includes learning activities designed to address the needs of those working in the Workforce Development System – specifically One-Stop Career Centers. The scope of this portion of the curriculum includes:

- History of Workforce Policy and Legislation and connection to the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and One-Stop System.
- Learning activities using new Department of Labor products such as O*NET Online and the O*NET Interest Profiler.
- Learning activities that address the unique needs of Adults, Youth and Dislocated Workers.

Individuals with an extensive background in career development, career assessment, occupational information, job-hunting, retention and career counseling, and have worked, taught, or trained in settings such as one-stop career centers, job service agencies, business and industry, K-12 education, community colleges or universities are eligible for admission to the course designed for instructors. Graduates of this course are listed on an international registry by the Rutgers University Heldrich Center to teach the *Working Ahead* curriculum. The instructors are also eligible to apply to CCE for international certification as having met CCE's educational requirements for a Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) instructor.

The growth of the One-Stop career center system throughout the United States has produced a demand for well-trained, credentialed workforce professionals to deliver a wide and varied range of services. Certification as a Global Career Development Facilitator is one means for a system to ensure a minimum level of workforce professional staff competency. Instructors in counseling and career development may also utilize the GCDF Instructor's course to upgrade their professional skills to provide the highest level of education to human service and workforce professionals in training. Most importantly, graduates of these workshops will be able to conduct courses for those seeking to qualify as Global Career Development Facilitators.

The Global Career Development Facilitator works in an organization that provides career services to customers. The training is designed to enhance the skills needed to help customers make informed career and job decisions, develop a career plan of action and conduct a successful job search. The required GCDF credential competencies, approved by the CCE affiliate of NBCC, include: Helping Skills, Diversity, Technology, Labor Market Information, Assessment, Career Development Models, Employability Skills, Training Peers and Clients, Promotion and Public Relations, Program Management Implementation, and Scope of Practice-Ethics-Consultation.

Organizations with One-Stop system workers who would benefit from the training include One-Stop Career Centers, Educational Institutions at all levels, Youth Agencies, Job Corps, Vocational Rehabilitation, Social/Human Services, Youth Agencies, Job Corps, Corrections, Community and Faith-based Organizations, and Housing Authorities. In today's job market, the private business sector human resource and job development centers are also prime candidates to benefit from this training.

More than ninety instructors are currently trained to teach the *Working Ahead* curriculum.

The list of instructors is on the Heldrich Center Web Site at <http://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu/linkpage.htm>. The Instructor training is offered as a noncredit course or as a graduate course. NECA will be offering CEUs as part of the course offering.

Highlights of the National Workforce and Career Development Curriculum

The Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University seeks to be a leader in helping to establish an efficient and effective public and private workforce investment system and thereby creating greater opportunities for workers and employers and a stronger national economy. Today, hundreds of thousands of Americans serve the nation's workforce system in state and local government offices, colleges, high schools, community- and faith-based organizations, and human resource departments. These men and women need to validate their current skills and learn new ways of working effectively with their customers. *Working Ahead: The National Workforce and Career Development Curriculum*, offers genuine opportunities to those working in the system and those seeking a career in this profession to improve, learn, and become nationally certified.

Audience. Today, thousands of people are employed in private organizations as well as federal, state and local government programs to deliver workforce development services. Their job titles vary: counselors, job coaches, teachers, trainers, job developers, intake workers, interviewers, crew leaders, or employment specialists. While these professionals have many different approaches, they share the same goal: to improve the employment opportunities of individuals by helping them identify, find and maintain careers and jobs. While these workers are bound by a unity of purpose, they have been guided, historically, by little else than legislation and funding streams, regulation, and practical experience. Essentially, anyone with direct contact with individuals seeking service would benefit from this course.

Benefits. At the start of a new century, we are charged with creating a Career Development Resource System that is free and open to all. This presents an enormous responsibility—and a great opportunity. As the One-Stop Career System becomes established as a universal community resource, we can expect the general public to have an increased interest in the qualifications of the career center staff. The new GCDF credential conveys to job seekers, employers, Workforce Investment Boards, and the general public that the holder has a minimum set of knowledge, skills and competencies, and has met a professional standard. Specifically, customers/clients, and the public at large, can expect credentialed Global Career Development Facilitators to:

- Understand the components of the One-Stop System including One-Stop Career Center and Career Development models.
- Improve helping and customer service skills to assist customers with making “informed choices.”
- Be knowledgeable of case management processes that support the One-Stop System.
- Effectively use technology as a resource to help customers with career and job

- search assistance such as America's Career Network and O*NET.
- Work effectively with diverse populations, adapting services to meet their needs.
 - Understand the labor market and labor market information.
 - Effectively use informal and formal assessment tools.
 - Follow Global Career Development Facilitator Code of Ethics and know related legislative regulations and policies.

The *Working Ahead* curriculum will be continually updated. As new workforce development policies and processes are developed and implemented, the curriculum will reflect the changes, and the curriculum can also be customized to meet local training needs. However, to meet the educational requirements for GCDF certification, a full 120-hour course of instruction must be completed. Others will receive a certificate of attendance.

The curriculum will help those making a career in this profession develop specific skills needed to facilitate the career development of adults and young people coming through the One-Stop Career System, ultimately connecting with most organizations providing career development services to the public. The curriculum is also designed to enhance a student's professional identity and pride, as well as understanding of the scope of the profession, and the history and theory upon which it is based.

Course Administration and Implementation. The Heldrich Center curriculum integrates hands-on experience and theory through instruction in 13 core competencies by providing critical helping/customer service skills throughout. This approach will provide students with the training to work effectively in a high-quality career services environment. The 120-hour class time in a course taught by certified instructors meets the education requirement for the CCE international credential.

Customizing the Curriculum. Through customization, the educational requirements for the GCDF credential can be achieved through the Heldrich Center curriculum, utilizing a multilevel training package that promotes continuous improvement and lifelong learning. Specifically, an agency can determine which competencies are delivered and the schedule for delivery. This approach allows the agency to prioritize the competencies delivered, based upon agency-determined time frames and staffing needs. Each curriculum module of the *Working Ahead* curriculum or its sub-parts can be offered as part of a full 120-hour curriculum or on an individual basis. However, to meet the educational requirement of the GCDF Credential, a full program must be completed.

Accessibility to this program will be greatly expanded in the near future with the provision of distance learning (an online course program). This delivery format will afford agencies, staff and others interested in obtaining the credential, greater access, availability and customization. The distance learning component will be combined with in-person/group sessions, establishing a balance between technology applications and interpersonal/in-person learning. Thus, while the online application removes the barriers of time and space associated with traditional learning, the in-person sessions balance the provision for experiential learning.

Heldrich Center Instructor Registry. The Heldrich Center has established a *Working Ahead* Instructor Registry to ensure the effective implementation of the curriculum. Individuals who successfully complete the *Working Ahead Instructor Course* will be certified by the Heldrich Center and their names will be placed on the Instructor Registry. In addition, the Center for Credentialing and Education, Inc. will be notified that the individual is a Heldrich Center Registered *Working Ahead* Instructor. The Registry will enable organizations that want to have their staff trained in *Working Ahead* to know who are the qualified instructors certified to teach the program. The Registry will also enable instructors to network with each other, as well as, provide Heldrich Center updates and communication.

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Notes:

¹ US Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration programs, the US Employment Service, Vocational Rehabilitation and Veterans' Services, community colleges, among many others.

² "Training Needs of Career Development Facilitators," Judith Hoppin and Howard Splete, Career Development and Training Institute at Oakland University, March 1994



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