

NATIONAL **Youth** DEVELOPMENT Learning Network

Professional Development Series E-Newsletter

July 2005

The National Youth Development Learning Network (NYDLN) is a project of the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY), a coalition of youth-serving agencies that collectively serves more than 40 million youth, employs over 100,000 paid staff and utilizes more than six million volunteers.

Certificates, Credentials and Degrees for Youth Development Workers

Today's youth worker is working in an environment that is evolving, with growing attention being paid to their professional development needs. The number of opportunities for individuals who work with and on behalf of young people is increasing. Community colleges, colleges, and universities are all beginning to offer formal coursework for those in the field of youth development. The focus of these educational opportunities includes front-line workers and the managers and directors of youth development programs. The colleges and universities mentioned are just a sample of the type of work that is occurring on campuses across the nation and are not meant to be comprehensive.

When certificates, credentials, and degrees are offered through institutions of higher education, youth development professionals can acquire knowledge and skills that are formally recognized. The emergence of these higher education programs could lead to a more formal educational structure for youth development workers similar to that for public school teachers.

Challenges

University and college programs not only vary in type but in focus. Programs may prepare youth development workers to work directly with young people, manage programs, work on behalf of young people in the policy arena, work in governmental positions, or occupy other positions. In addition, university and colleges face several challenges as degree programs are created:

- There is tension about this issue across the field. Despite the benefits of academic programs in helping to ensure the credibility and professionalism of youth development, there is also credibility and professionalism in the years of experience that many have had doing the work. The challenge remains

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to bridge the acknowledgement of on the job experience with more formal academic approaches.

- Though academic preparation does offer an opportunity to provide consistent preparation across the field, there still remains the possibility that each of these independent colleges and universities create their coursework in isolation.
- Colleges and universities face the challenge of marketing courses to young people who are interested in pursuing careers in the field of youth development. Given the current state of the field, young people often see this degree as costly and not necessarily financially beneficial.¹

Promising Practices

Although there are challenges, community colleges, colleges, and universities now provide degree programs for students.

Penn Valley Community College in Kansas City, Missouri offers a youth development certificate program that requires twelve hours of college credit. To ensure that the newly developed courses were true to a positive youth development philosophy, YouthNet (a Youth Development Intermediary Organization) negotiated to have YouthNet staff help develop and teach the courses.

¹ For further information contact the author, Dr. Lynne M. Borden, University of Arizona.

WHAT IS THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES?

“Through its extensive experience in the field, the Casey Foundation has found that a stable, prepared, and motivated human services workforce yields real reform and better results for children and families.”

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Human Services Workforce Initiative

Any organization’s ability to make a difference in a young person’s life is dependent upon the people in that organization. Success requires dedicated, skilled and creative people able to lead organizations, manage and implement high-quality programs. The Professional Development Series explores promising strategies in youth development designed to further attract, develop and retain youth development workers. The publications will be short, 3-5 page snapshots of work being done in the following areas:

- **Competencies**
<http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Competencies.pdf>
- **Training and Training Approval Systems (Pre-Service, In Service)**
- **Blended Learning, E-Learning and Classroom Learning**
- **Mentoring**
http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Prof_Series_ENews3.pdf
- **Recruitment and Selection**
http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Prof_Series_2_3-19.pdf
- **Professional Associations**
- **Program Standards**
- **Career Development (Registry, Portfolio, Career Opportunities)**
- **Career Lattice (Certificates, Credentials, Degrees)**
- **Recognition**
- **Compensation and Benefits**
- **Retention**
- **Resources for Professional Development**

The certificate program is housed in the Department of Human Services, which already offered an associate degree with an emphasis on human services. Two concentrated courses were developed specifically for the certificate and were combined with four existing classes, one of which included a practicum experience.

The Indiana Youth Development (IYD) Credential is through **Ivy Tech Community College** and is a professional recognition for those who have completed coursework and demonstrated competence at the entry-level. To earn the IYD Credential an individual must complete the following: 135 contact hours of college level instruction/training that covers specified areas and levels of competence; an additional 45 hours of course work, non-formal training and/or experience; at least 480 hours of experience working with children and youth. The IYD Credential is for anyone 18 years or older who works with children and youth, and who has no formal education beyond the high school diploma, or whose post-secondary education is in an unrelated field of study.

The **American Humanics'** bachelor's degree certification process is an innovative course of study that trains university students to become skilled professionals and leaders in America's youth and human service agencies. Through experiential education, competencies—both foundation and professional development—are gained by the students as a requirement to obtain the American Humanics certification. This program works in partnership with universities and colleges to establish a certification process in nonprofit management that is incorporated into undergraduate training. In addition to its educational curriculum, American Humanics provides leadership opportunities, internships, and financial aid.

The Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (Great Plains IDEA, or GPI) is a consortium of human science colleges at ten universities that offers a multi-institutional post-baccalaureate degree program in youth development (**Online degree program**). The youth development program offers a thirty-six-credit master's degree as well as two certificates for individuals who do not wish to pursue a master's degree: specialist certificates in youth development or youth program management and evaluation. Twenty-eight credits for this program are offered through the consortium, with the remaining eight credits offered through the student's "residential institution." These last eight credits permit faculty and degree candidates to take courses furthering their specialization or negotiate practicum experiences, where they can work with their faculty adviser to enhance and apply the skills they have acquired.

“As a teacher turned youth development professional, I wholeheartedly support the Great Plains Initiative and their Youth Development program’s mission. I feel the quality of the instruction I received was superior, both the curriculum and delivery method. Even in the distance delivery I felt I had a personal relationship with my professors and that they were vested in my learning experience.”

—Great Plains graduate

Clemson University offers a 36 credit hour Master of Science in Youth Development program. This degree is designed to fulfill the need across the state, region, and nation for formal education that prepares students for careers in youth related areas. The interdisciplinary program is a college-wide degree program involving units in the College of Health, Education, and Human Development (HEHD) as well as related disciplines across the campus. The program is provided entirely through *distance delivery*. However, an on-site 3-day session is required each fall and spring.

Harvard has designed two programs in one framework. A student can choose to take the youth development program with emphasis on adolescence from age eleven through nineteen and receive a certificate of advanced study—a one-year program designed for mid-career professionals—or they can choose to work toward a master’s of education, which is a thirty-two-credit program.

University of Minnesota in the College of Education and Human Development, in association with the Center for 4-H Youth Development, offers Youth Development Leadership Master of Education degree. An interdisciplinary faculty teaches this 30-credit master’s degree program. Students are fulltime, working professionals with at least two years of work experience in the field. Each yearly cohort averages 21 people. Focus areas include concentrations in evaluation, research, children’s rights, counseling, program development, special needs populations, supervision, family systems, and social group work. There will soon be options at University of Minnesota to move from an undergraduate Youth Studies degree, to an MA to MEd, and then a PhD, with non-credit options in between from the Youth Work Institute.

“The Youth Development Leadership Master’s program and the new Family, Youth and Community PhD program both operate from the stance that youth development work is educational in nature, and deeply intertwines with the relationships between their youth, their families, and the communities in which they live. I liked being able to blend theory and practice in my Med, and my PhD programs and to build into my program plan the kind of electives that made sense for my future work.”

—University of Minnesota graduate

Contact Pam Garza at pam@nassembly.org for more information about the Professional Development Series or other work of the National Youth Development Learning Network.

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