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Year Up: A Pioneering Program

As part of my doctoral studies at The University of Texas at Austin, I recently read *A Year Up: How a Pioneering Program Teaches Young Adults Real Skills for Real Jobs with Real Success*. This text illustrates the workforce problem America is facing and shares practical solution-based approaches. The author gives community college administrators hope by encouraging them to work strategically with all segments of society to ensure that young adults become productive members of society.

Year Up—an educational training program that provides a stipend, free college courses, and a paid internship—is structured, intense, and has characteristics of boot camp training for the military. There is a strong financial commitment from corporations, with less than 10% of funding coming from government. However, it is not a miracle program. The concepts are based on a practitioner's approach of reaching out to talented and resilient young people between the ages of 18-24 who have been marginalized by a dysfunctional education system.

The book challenges community college administrators to compare graduation rates from different lenses. Access and enrollment rates have increased over the past 40 years, yet only 34% of high school graduates complete a degree program within eight years. The soft bigotry of low expectations that some would argue was created by a broken public education system is not tolerated at Year Up. Students sign contracts, have core values, and have demanding schedules. There are wrap-around services to address mental health and wellness. Learning communities serve as a cohort model and help address the need to build community among a group of young adults who have experienced homelessness, violence, and abuse.

The program has partnered with community colleges to scale service to more than 100,000 students annually. Professional Training Corps (PTC), which is modeled after the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), is housed in the community colleges and requires all students to wear business attire instead of fatigues. Offering living wage employment, internships, and a connection to the local labor market is marketable.

Over 70% of Year Up students graduate. Currently, the US Government Office of Accountability reports spending \$18 billion in funding for 47 workforce development programs across the nation. Only five of them have been evaluated, and none of them have a clear connection to employers. There are many similarities in the students served by Year Up and community colleges. Currently, Year Up has partnered with 10 community colleges across the nation to reach a broader population of students.

Typically this program targets adults under 25. Although this age group is critical to reach, it is also important for higher education to begin creating similar programs for our 25- to 45-year-old students who in many cases have complex, employment-related issues. Over the next five years, Year Up plans to implement three major initiatives—growing their core models,

piloting more scalable alternative models, and continuing to influence systemic change. The book provides excellent examples of how partnerships in education and industry can make a huge impact on workforce development and also provides case studies that could serve as a great professional development opportunity for P-12 administrators, college student services staff, and faculty.

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