



Preparing Young People for Careers

Impact Statement

The Problem/Issue:

According to the Alabama Department of Industrial Relations, Alabama's unemployment rate was 5.8 percent in December 2003, higher than the 5.7 percent experienced by the U.S. during the same period. The skills gap, and the cause of the gap, is prevalent in Alabama, as it is in the rest of the nation. There is also 'disconnect' between the increases of new "unmanned" jobs that demand new skills, and the large numbers of unskilled workers not ready to use new technology. A digital divide separates our nation into technological haves and have nots. Large numbers of workers now compete in decreasing traditional job markets, such as manufacturing, while the unemployment gap increases. There is already a wide gap in the unemployment rate of high school dropouts that is four times that of a college graduate.

What's Been Done:

Extension has adapted and developed workforce preparation programs to answer the challenge. The effort's Job Readiness Programs and Youth Career Summits, as well as curriculums such as Welcome to the Real World and Works for Me, are targeting young people with vital information. Youth Career Summits are designed for unique audiences, such as senior high females, to give a broader view of the nontraditional careers available to them in the high-wage and high-tech fields. Recent data reveals that women are under represented in the high-paying technical fields. The summit is designed to educate the students about careers in high-skill and high-wage fields such as aviation, automotive, manufacturing and allied health. The summit is in partnership with vocational schools and junior colleges and was a part of the AACC-ACCT Community College Agenda for the 107th Congress.

Approximately 8,000 high school students in Houston, Mobile and Madison, have participated in Youth Career Summits since their inception in 2000. This past year, over 2,225 students attended the program in Houston and Madison Counties. Although the summit was developed to increase the 15 percent female presence in unique technological fields, young men are now given the same opportunities and approximately 2,000 have attended. Welcome to the Real World reached approximately 1,834 participants in 2003. It renders a proactive and holistic view of real-life choices that must be made by self-sufficient, 25-year-old adults regarding career, budget, emergency and other life considerations. The Welcome to the Real World curriculum activity was used

local, county, state and national levels at schools, community centers, agency JOBS programs, and Boys & Girls Clubs. Welcome to the Real World touched over 9,000 young people since its first use in Alabama.

Why We Care:

Education officials continue to be very positive about the influence of the Youth Career Summits. According to surveys, school counselors agree that most students who have not made up their minds about careers usually consider one of the careers presented at the summit. Surveys show that 75 percent of the students surveyed after the Youth Career Summit answered “yes” to the question “Do you think you will pursue a career in one of the technical areas you learned about during the Youth-Career Summit?” Welcome to the Real World maintains an approval rating of between 95 and 97 percent approval rating from the participants, the professionals and the volunteers. Two-thirds of the students have considered a career change after the activity. Instructors often use this curriculum in conjunction with financial management, career development and mathematics classes.