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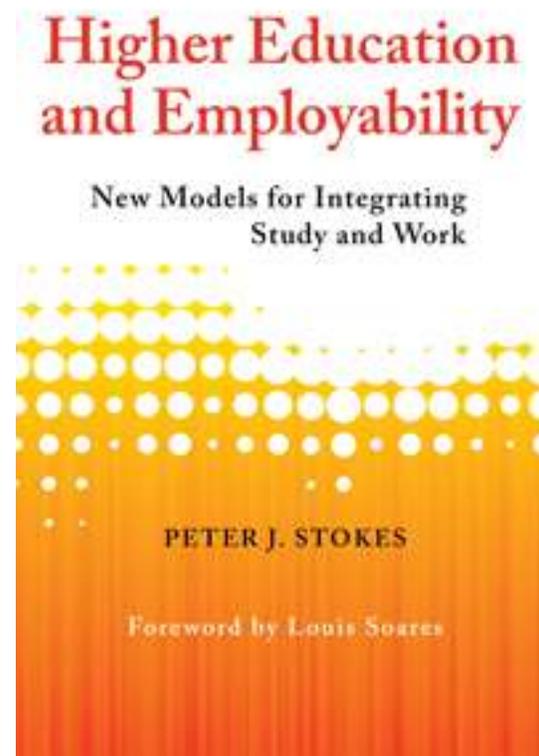
Stokes, P. J. (2015). *Higher education and employability: New models for integrating study and work*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

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What is the function of a college or university education? Does the attainment of a baccalaureate degree truly enhance one's ability to obtain stable and gainful employment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What highly sought-after skills, abilities, and characteristics do students in the postmodern, post-recession era need to possess to meet the desires of business and industry? Should four-year colleges and universities amend their mission statements to include practical considerations concerning workforce development that assist with the employability of their graduates? Peter J. Stokes addressed these poignant questions and more in *Higher Education and Employability: New Models for Integrating Study and Work*. Stokes contends that institutions of higher learning, including research universities, should be forced to reexamine the assumptions about their purpose, mission, and values and innovate through various channels to be different and be responsible for their students' employability.



## Organization

Stokes gradually introduces readers to the complex phenomena of higher education and employability. The text first affords sound reasoning for the need of workforce development in tertiary education; advances to include a plethora of expansions taking place within university settings, through partnerships with business and industry, new innovations, and entrepreneurial efforts; and ultimately provides several case studies of specific universities career development offerings. After introducing the topic, Stokes utilizes an old Georgia Tech tradition dubbed *Drownproofing*, whereby students had to learn to float vertically with both hands and feet tied in order to graduate, as a metaphor for career readiness, yet with much-needed upgrades. Stokes rationalizes the need for modern-day *Drownproofing 2.0* and provides examples with his justifications. He explores multiple innovative institutions attempting various modes of workforce development, entrepreneurs entering the market of developing aptitudes and linking students to employers, and competing substitutes that are attempting to teach specific skill development independent of the educational establishment. Then, in-depth case studies reveal the specific efforts Georgia Tech, New York University, and Northeastern University designed and implemented to connect learning with real workplace learning and assisting their clientele with a broader range of proficiencies needed to heighten their prospects for obtaining gainful employment. Ultimately, Stokes encourages institutions of higher education to differentiate themselves from the norm, not only for their own wellbeing but for those whom they serve.

## Stokes' Ideas

*Higher Education and Employability* does not belittle or mock traditional education or favor vocationalism. For the most part, it advocates for a paradigm shift toward synthesis of independent and ingenious forms. Stokes' work acts as a call to action,

strongly suggesting universities be relevant, responsive to markets, and focused on student career development. Modern-day *Drownproofing* is rooted in the premise that institutions of higher learning, including research universities, should be burdened with a responsibility for workforce development.

*Drownproofing 2.0* is a response to current economic and workplace realities as well as new types of education and training that have emerged in the marketplace. Noting the high unemployment and underemployment rates for traditional liberal arts graduates, Stokes warns of a possible risk to those institutions that are "catering too narrowly" (p. 20) to their future alumni. He argues that the de facto mission of college should be to promote graduates with the skills employers require, allowing them to "hit the workplace floor running" (p. 15). To this end, Stokes suggests that collaboration between research universities and business and industry take place to narrow the chasm between what institutions produce and what employers want. Employers must become involved in curriculum development, teaching, and learning, while educational providers willfully step into the world of work. Partnerships can stimulate work readiness through the establishment of well-designed situationally specific plans that incorporate offerings such as: cooperative education, apprenticeships, internships, problem-based and experiential-based learning, and curricula that connect learning to real workplace experiences. In addition, colleges and universities can develop sought-after qualities such as mindfulness, inquisitiveness, assertiveness, resilience, optimism, curiosity, empathy, and self-awareness.

## Strengths

Beyond the passionate plea, the depth of information Stokes provides regarding innovative and entrepreneurial efforts to link students to jobs and alternate sources of education and training are the major strengths of *Higher Education and Employability*. The

seemingly endless array of detailed information on start-up services offers insights to a burgeoning new reality beyond MOOCs and also serves as a resource and reference, respectfully.

The author deemed many programs as innovators. As one would expect, this group included a discussion of online offerings. Universities with competency-based models that allow students to *test-out* of courses demonstrating understanding comprised this group. Finally, universities with experiential learning programs that incorporated bridge programs, cooperative education, internships, service learning, and community service were included, followed by discussions of other lesser-known, burgeoning alternatives.

Stokes highlights countless entrepreneurs serving as intermediaries that connect students to the world of work. Discussion of businesses dedicated to linking education and work not only helps to differentiate his text but allows it to serve as a resource to student service professionals and college students. Multiple corporations have established methods for students to create portfolios of professional work. A plethora of nontraditional intermediaries dedicated to pushing degree earners into the workforce and others offering methods of connecting or bridging students to work exist. While these work with the accredited institutions, new non-traditional opportunities comprise the third and final category.

### Considerations

Although passionate and strong in his stance, and vehemently declaring his work does not attack traditional institutions, Stokes fails to provide a thorough consideration of those who argue the merits of a liberal arts education for the purposes of career success. Roth (2014) maintains the traditional American humanistic education focused on liberating the whole person through self-criticism and inquiry, has enriched the lives of generations and built our nation, by continually reshaping both student and the

world via the unlocking of creative potential and critical thinking. Addressing this counterargument would have allowed for a more balanced text, made it less of a diatribe, and added credibility to the manuscript.

Detailed consideration regarding community college systems, who serve the masses by offering education and training programs that lead to gainful employment, should have also been included. Are community colleges not tertiary institutions within the higher education classification? Why do we not laud this diverse, far-reaching, highly pragmatic offering? Symonds, Schwartz, and Furguson (2011) stress the problematic nature of the four-year college-for-all mentality, noting a multitude of other *pathways to prosperity*. Carnevale et al. (2011) reveal a multitude of occupations, from a variety of different industries and career clusters, which offer living wages and can be obtained without a bachelor's degree. To add, community colleges in different states now grant applied baccalaureate degrees. It has been argued that this is an example of "mission creep." One could argue the same about institutions of higher learning focused on the development of specific occupational skills.

### Reflection

Professional school counselors aim to promote college and career readiness. New models of training and education are entering the workforce development scene, substituting and circumventing traditional educational routes that often lead students into debt and underemployment. Pathways abound. How do guidance counselors better prepare students for the postmodern world of work, given the dynamic changes altering the economic landscape and that of higher education? How can school counselors assist with the employability of students in secondary education when that of baccalaureate degree earners is questioned? There is a need for comprehensive workforce guidance at all levels of education.

Economic, consumer, competitive, and regulatory forces are actively changing institutions of higher learning. *Higher Education and Employability* examines this reality, revealing that many research universities are carving out new niches, actively rebranding, and are keenly focused on the employability of their student body in an era where many in society question the value of a liberal arts education. Stokes approves such efforts and suggests that other institutions follow suit. Furthermore, his text highlights the emerging trend of new entities that link school to work,

and new education and training pathways that may compete with traditional offerings once business and industry value their certifications. In the end, the marketplace will decide the best course of action for future students to pursue. All told, one cannot help but applaud the diversification of offerings mentioned in this text, which is the book's true strength. In America there should be not only options but competition. *Higher Education and Employability* is a good read that chronicles the development of this new reality.

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## About the Reviewer

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