

Effects of Employment on Student Academic Success

Compiled December 2006

BYU Employment Services

The average yearly costs of education continue to increase around the country. According to the College Board's "Trends in College Pricing", the 2006-2007 average total costs (including tuition, fees, room and board, books and supplies, transportation, and other expenses) are \$16,357 for four-year public colleges and universities; and \$33,301 for four-year private colleges and universities. These costs represent nearly a 6 percent tuition increase from 2005-2006. Inflation during that same period was approximately 4 percent.

As anxiety rises concerning the escalating costs of schooling, students are left with the decision of how to fund their education. Some take out loans, or qualify for grants or scholarships. Others, however, are left to pay their own way by means of full-time or part-time employment. Approximately 80 percent of all college students are employed while completing their undergraduate education (Riggert).

Many studies have been conducted to determine the effects of full-time and part-time employment on the academic success of college students. The purpose of this paper is to summarize some of the general findings and implications of these studies, and to provide suggestions regarding how university student-employment offices may utilize these data.

Effects on GPA

A major factor in determining the positive or negative effects of employment on the academic performance of students is their GPA. One would intuitively conclude that, because time and energy are finite resources, jobs would detract from studying and be harmful to a student's GPA. Most studies conclude that this is only the case when the student's number of hours worked per week exceeds 20 hours. In fact, students who work fewer than 15-20 hours often report higher GPAs than those who do not work at all (Dundes). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which is run by the U.S. Department of Education, found that students working 1-15 hours weekly have a significantly higher GPA than both students working 16 or more hours and students who don't work at all. The NCES is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education.

Dundes and Marx (2006) reported that 74 percent of student-workers believed that employment forced them to become more efficient. However, 64 percent reported that employment also increased their level of stress.

Many sources concluded that working had little or no effect on GPA. Following an in-depth study of the topic, included in the *Journal of Human Resources*, Ehrenberg and Sherman (1987) stated, "We do not find any strong evidence...that hours of work during the academic year in the range that students worked significantly reduced grade point averages."

Other studies concluded that only on-campus employment had a positive influence on academic performance. Astin (1975) reported that the effects of on-campus employment were characterized as positive in nature, while off-campus student employment is associated with lower GPA. The positive effects of on-campus employment are due to enhanced integration with the institution, including involvement with other students and with faculty (Furr). In addition, on-campus jobs often include responsibilities with academic components.

Effects on Time to Graduation

Again, given that time and energy are finite resources, one might assume that in order for a student's GPA to not be negatively affected, time to graduation would have to be increased. Ehrenberg and Sherman (1987) agreed with this. They concluded that this is caused by the perception that students would need to reduce the number of credit hours they carry each term in order to make time for employment.

Working more than 20 hours a week off campus contributes to a higher likelihood that students will drop out of school before receiving a degree. Full-time workers are 10 percent less likely to eventually receive a degree than part-time workers or those who do not work at all (Orszag). However, working 20 hours or less per week on campus did not seem to have an effect on drop-out rates compared to non-workers. In fact, Astin concludes that having a part-time, on-campus job strongly increases the student's chances of finishing college.

Effects on Future Earnings

Recent estimates reveal that academic success in school has a smaller effect on post-school wages than older models indicate. Student employment, however, has an additional, positive effect (Light). Other studies indicate that although working in college does not appear to have a direct effect on post-college earnings, there is an indirect effect on persistence (completing a degree) and GPA. In addition, working on

campus was associated with a higher probability of enrolling in post-graduate education (Ehrenberg). This, in turn, results in higher future earnings.

As mentioned earlier, on-campus jobs often include responsibilities with academic components. These opportunities will improve their academic experience and enhance their résumé through meaningful, applicable work, resulting in improved marketability to higher-paying jobs.

Conclusions

Although working a large number of hours (20+) can be detrimental to students' academic success, part-time (specifically on-campus) jobs can be very beneficial in many ways. Working a moderate number of hours often correlates with higher GPA. These jobs help students be more effective and organized and provide important skills. On-campus jobs often lead to greater integration into the university and provide applicable work experience.

Students should be very conscious of the number of hours they work. Although the line at which working becomes detrimental is ambiguous, overworking may decrease GPA and increase time to graduation and dropout rates.

Suggestions for University Student Employment Offices

Much of this data, especially regarding the effects of part-time employment on students' GPA, is counter-intuitive. Without knowing these facts, students will naturally assume that working will be detrimental to their academic success. They don't understand that working in moderation may increase efficiency and organization, and teach important skills that will augment their post-college marketability.

Brigham Young University has a limit of twenty hours that students can work on campus each week. A limit like this is highly suggested. Between fifteen and twenty hours a week appears to be the point at which working starts to become more detrimental than beneficial for students.

University student-employment offices should encourage students looking for financial aid to consider part-time, on-campus job opportunities. Student employment offices should also provide students with resources to learn time management. Student employees who learn time management are most likely to excel in both school and work, which will benefit them in their post-college endeavors.

Shawn Hammond

References

Astin, A.W. (1975). *Preventing Students From Dropping Out*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

The College Board (2006). *Trends in College Pricing*. Trends in Higher Education Series.

Dundes, L. and Marx, J. (2006). Balancing Work and Academics in College: Why do Students Working 10-19 Hours Per Week Excel? *Journal of College Student Retention*, 8(1) 107-120.

Ehrenberg, R.G. and Sherman, D.R. (1987). Employment While in College, Academic Achievement, and Postcollege Outcomes: A Summary of Results. *The Journal of Human Resources*, 22(1), 1-23.

Furr, S.R. and Elling, T.W. (2000). The Influence of Work on College Student Development. *NASPA Journal*, 37(2) 454-470.

Light, A. (2001). In-School Work Experience and the Returns to Schooling. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 19(1) 65-93.

National Center For Education Statistics (1994). Undergraduates Who Work While Enrolled in Postsecondary Education: 1989-1990. *Statistical Analysis Report: June 1994*, 43-47.

Orszag, J.M, Orszag, P.R. and Whitmore D. M. (2001). Learning and Earning: Working in College. Commissioned by *Upromise*.

Riggert, S.C. et al (2006). Student Employment and Higher Education: Empiricism and Contradiction. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(1), 63-92.