

# Effects of Employment on Student Academic Success

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BYU Employment Services

The average yearly costs of education continue to increase around the country. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the 2013-2014 average total costs (including tuition, fees, room and board, books and supplies, transportation, and other expenses) are \$15,640 for four-year public colleges and universities and \$35,987 for four-year private colleges and universities. These costs represent nearly a 3 percent tuition increase from 2012-2013. Inflation during that same period was approximately 3 percent.

As the cost of schooling increases, 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 71 percent of all college students are employed while completing their undergraduate education (2010 US Census).

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.

Other studies concluded that only on-campus employment had a positive influence on academic performance. Lederman (2009) reported from a study done by Gary Pike (2004), that **working more than 20 hours a week has a negative impact on students' grades whether on or off campus**. However the study also found that students who work 20 hours or less on campus report higher levels on all five levels of engagement used by Pike and his co-authors. 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**

**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 students who did not work. In fact, Astin (1975) 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.

### **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.

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