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## *Student Part-Time Jobs: The Relationship Between Type of Job and Academic Performance*

*by Surjit K. Bella and Mary E. Huba*

As college costs continue to soar across campuses in the U. S., students find it increasingly difficult to afford them. Although financial aid is available to students who show need based on a need analysis system, not all students are eligible to receive this assistance, whether it takes the form of gift aid, such as scholarships, grants, and low-interest loans, or of jobs through work-study funds. The Middle Income Assistance Act of November 1978 made it possible for many students to borrow Guaranteed Student Loans (GSL). Even though the number of students borrowing GSLs has until recently increased, many students are still unable to meet their college costs. In addition, in spite of the availability of loans, students in need usually prefer to borrow as little as possible. Since many parents are either unable or unwilling to pay 100 percent of their children's college expenses, students often have little choice but to think of supplementing the financing of their education through employment.

This is not a new phenomenon; earning while learning has been part of many students' education since the inception of formal schooling. And part-time employment has proven its merit in a number of ways. It provides to the student both the financial assistance needed to supplement other resources to meet college costs and the practical experience which may enhance opportunities for future employment. In addition, it makes available to the college or university a source of inexpensive labor to accomplish needed work, to maintain the system, and to attract students to the campus. Nevertheless, many students, parents, and even administrators raise a number of questions. Does part-time employment interfere with a student's academic performance? Does a job relevant to a student's academic curriculum enhance his/her chances of achieving better academically than a non-relevant job? Should freshmen students be allowed to work part time? What are the ideal number of hours students can work per week without interfering with or interrupting their academic goals, achievement, etc.? Answers to these and many other aspects of part-time employment need to be studied thoroughly in order to provide information necessary for students, parents, academic advisors, and administrators, in planning, setting policy guidelines, and funding effective student work programs.

Many studies have been conducted which address these concerns. A number of them have examined the effects of part-time employment on the academic performance of working students. Gaston (1973) conducted a study at Western Washington State College to examine the effects of up to fifteen hours a week work-study employment on the academic performance of full-time students contrasted

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with those who were not working at all. Her conclusions were that students who worked part time performed academically as well as students who were not required to work. Studies conducted by Hay and Lindsay (1970) also indicate that part-time employment for a moderate number of hours (one to fifteen) does not adversely affect academic performance. Hay and Lindsay also concluded that students achieve better if the job is relevant to their major or curriculum than if it is not relevant.

Hay also conducted a study in 1969 with a sample of 891 full-time freshmen and sophomore students to examine how part-time work affects academic performance. Forty-seven percent of the students participating in this study worked part time with an average of 17.8 hours per week. Findings indicated that there were no significant differences in the grade-point averages of those who worked fifteen hours or less per week and those who worked more. He also found that freshmen working more than sixteen hours per week did not perform academically as well as did sophomores who worked the same number of hours.

Macgregor (1966) analyzed the responses of 2000, undergraduate students to a questionnaire related to part-time work at Brooklyn College. His results indicate that approximately 53 percent of the students worked part-time. A majority of the working students felt it was a good experience in their career development. It prepared them, the survey revealed, for real world or post-graduate living, and the work experience fostered professional contacts for future employment. About fifty percent of the non-working respondents felt working part-time could interfere with their academic or extracurricular activities.

The major concern that haunts many students, parents, and administrators alike is, "Should a freshman student work?" Most freshmen students and their parents feel that allowing freshmen students to work may interfere with their adjustment to the academic or college environment. To study this question, Barnes and Keene (1974) conducted a study at Southern Illinois University to compare the initial grade-point averages of financially needy students who worked with those of needy students who did not work. Their findings indicated that part-time work in an on-campus job did not interfere with the initial academic adjustment of freshmen students.

In one of the few extensively conducted studies evaluating the relationship of the type of work to student persistence, Astin (1975) classified jobs by their physical location, i.e., on-campus versus off-campus, as well as academic versus non-academic departments. His findings clearly encourage employment for students who enroll full time. Federal work-study jobs on campus, particularly during the freshman year, seem to enhance the chances of finishing college more than non-work-study jobs off campus. He also concluded that on-campus jobs, whether work-study or non-work-study, in an academic or non-academic part of the campus, have similar positive effects. Some of the reasons for the beneficial effects of on-campus employment could be the financial security that comes with the job and the positive effects of involvement with people and activities on campus.

In summary, a review of the literature concerning the effect of part-time employment on academic performance provides one general conclusion which remains consistent in study after study: low to moderate levels of part-time employment (one to fifteen hours per week) does not adversely affect academic performance. A number of research studies have focused on work-study employment, presumably because of availability of data to college-based researchers. Some researchers (notably Astin) have in addition studied the category of non-work-study jobs; however, to our knowledge no researchers have studied more specific categories. Almost all four-year colleges and universities across the nation provide jobs for students in food services and other types of university employment as well as work-

study opportunities. The present study is the first to examine the effect of working in these job categories on student's academic achievement.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between type of work (work-study, university employment, and food service) and academic achievement. Specifically, the objective was to find out if students with different types of jobs at Iowa State University differed in their cumulative grade-point average at the conclusion of the work experience in which they were involved.

#### *Definition of Terms*

*Employment:* This term refers to full-time students working part-time on campus. Although a student can work on or off campus, in this study reference will be made only to students working on campus.

*Work-Study:* This type of job is available to financial aid recipients. In order to be eligible, students must submit their Family Financial Statement (FFS) or Financial Aid Form (FAF), which asks for information about parents' financial circumstances. Students must show need for financial aid according to the need analysis system. They must be granted college work-study funds. The federal government pays eighty percent of the wage, while the employer pays twenty percent. As a result, job placement extends to most departments on campus since departments find it economical to hire work-study students. Departments employing work-study students are encouraged to relate available jobs to the student's educational program and career objectives. Thus, it is assumed that students who have work-study funds have a better opportunity to choose a job that is related to their curriculum and career objectives than students in other categories.

*University Employment:* These jobs are available to any student who wishes to work. The student is not required to submit his/her Family Financial Statement. Wages are paid 100 percent by the employing department through funds allocated to the departments within the university. Students can be employed in various departments, offices, or other units of the institution. Employers may require a specific academic background for a particular job if the knowledge required is necessary for adequate performance of the tasks involved in the job. As is true with the work-study category, employers in the university employment category are encouraged to relate a job to the student's educational program and career objectives.

*Food Services:* Students make application for these positions directly to the Residence Department. Wages can be paid "in kind" rather than with "cash". Each student works fifteen hours per week and receives both "meals" and "room" (approximately \$500 for the term or quarter). The job begins on the first day of food service and ends on the last day of the final week. In order to be eligible, the student must have a contract for room and board with the residence halls.

#### *Method*

The data for this study were taken from the records of all freshmen, sophomores, and juniors in 1976-1977 and 1977-1978 who attended the whole academic year, worked for at least two quarters, earned \$500 or more during the academic year, and worked in one of the types of jobs described above. A control group consisted of students who were aid recipients but who did not work in any on-campus job during the years in question.

The data for each student consisted of the cumulative grade-point average (GPA) at the end of the year in question and at least one measure of previous academic achievement. The latter was included so that the effect of the different work ex-

periences could be evaluated apart from any prior differences in academic ability which might have existed among the groups. The previous academic achievement of sophomores and juniors was indexed directly by their previous year's cumulative GPA. Since no previous GPA was available for freshmen, the previous academic achievement of each student was measured in turn by his/her high school rank (HSR), ACT score, and score on the Minnesota Scholastic Aptitude Test (MSAT). Although each of these is at best an *indirect* measure of previous academic achievement, all were employed in the analysis since they were considered sufficiently adequate to accomplish the objective in question, namely, to equate statistically the four freshman groups. Rank in one's high school class was selected since it is directly related to one's high school grade point. Scores on two standardized aptitude tests were also chosen since tests of this type are measures of prior learning (whether in or outside the classroom) and are generally included among the best predictors of subsequent school achievement.

Means and standard deviations of both the previous achievement measures and the cumulative GPA after the work experience were calculated for each experimental group in each class. Analyses of covariance were carried out on subsequent GPAs for each class, using the measure(s) of previous achievement as the covariate. Thus, in the analyses of covariance the independent variable was type of work experience, the dependent variable was GPA at the end of the work year, and the covariate was in turn HSR, ACT score, and MSAT score for freshmen and previous GPA for sophomores and juniors. Since not all achievement measures were available for every freshman, the number of students in each work category differs slightly from analysis to analysis.

#### Results and Discussion

Results summarized in Tables 1 through 3 show that the average adjusted post-

Table 1  
STATISTICS FOR FRESHMEN IN DIFFERENT WORK  
CATEGORIES SUMMARIZED BY ANALYSIS

Analysis	Statistics	Work Category			Control
		Work Study	University Employment	Food Service	
1	High School Rank (covariate)				
	Mean	23.04	24.80	19.70	20.74
	S.D.	16.55	19.81	15.52	16.89
	GPA				
	Unadjusted Mean	2.39	2.63	2.58	2.61
	S.D.	.62	.61	.71	.69
	Adjusted Mean	2.43	2.70	2.55	2.60
		(n=52)	(n=85)	(n=198)	(n=134)
2	ACT (covariate)				
	Mean	22.50	24.29	24.05	23.85
	S.D.	4.58	5.22	4.45	4.26
	GPA				
	Unadjusted Mean	2.47	2.67	2.60	2.65
	S.D.	.54	.63	.70	.68
	Adjusted Mean	2.58	2.63	2.58	2.65
		(n=44)	(n=73)	(n=184)	(n=121)
3	MSAT (covariate)				
	Mean	39.00	44.65	44.79	42.52
	S.D.	12.23	11.78	10.98	10.88
	GPA				
	Unadjusted Mean	2.40	2.63	2.58	2.61
	S.D.	.62	.61	.71	.69
	Adjusted Mean	2.53	2.59	2.55	2.64
		(n=53)	(n=85)	(n=198)	(n=134)

employment achievement of students in various work categories at Iowa State University did not differ dramatically from each other for any of the three grade levels. Table 1 summarizes the differences among the work categories on measures of previous achievement and post-employment GPA for freshmen. Analysis of covariance indicated that once the work categories were equated statistically on previous achievement measures, average freshman GPAs at the end of the year were not statistically significantly different (with covariate HSR:  $F(3,464) = 2.47, p \leq .06$ ; with covariate ACT:  $F(3,417) = .47, p \leq .70$ ; with covariate MSAT:  $F(3,465) = .86, p \leq .46$ ). Tables 2 and 3 show that average GPAs for sophomores and juniors both before and after the work experience were remarkably similar across the four levels of type of work experience. No differences in post-employment GPAs were statistically significant once differences in GPAs before the work experience were taken into account statistically (sophomores:  $F(3,811) = .52, p \leq .67$ ; juniors:  $F(3,1013) = .10, p \leq .90$ ).

Table 2  
GPA SUMMARY STATISTICS FOR SOPHOMORES IN  
DIFFERENT WORK CATEGORIES

Statistics	Work Category			
	Work Study	University Employment	Food Service	Control
Previous GPA (Covariate)				
Mean	2.65	2.75	2.55	2.71
S.D.	.56	.59	.54	.58
Subsequent GPA				
Unadjusted Mean	2.66	2.79	2.68	2.74
S.D.	.53	.56	.52	.55
Adjusted Mean	2.70	2.74	2.72	2.74
	(n=65)	(n=275)	(n=300)	(n=176)

Table 3  
GPA SUMMARY STATISTICS FOR JUNIORS IN  
DIFFERENT WORK CATEGORIES

Statistics	Work Category			
	Work Study	University Employment	Food Service	Control
Previous GPA (Covariate)				
Mean	2.89	2.84	2.71	2.77
S.D.	.55	.54	.51	.57
Subsequent GPA				
Unadjusted Mean	2.91	2.86	2.74	2.80
S.D.	.51	.54	.52	.56
Adjusted Mean	2.82	2.82	2.82	2.83
	(n=96)	(n=518)	(n=240)	(n=166)

Thus, results indicate that there are no significant differences among the GPAs of students who worked in different types of jobs and those who did not work at all as measured at the end of each academic year. Type of job at Iowa State University is evidently not related to the average academic performance of freshmen, sophomores, or juniors. In the case of freshman data, results are consistent with Henry (1967) and Barnes and Keene (1974) who found no difference in the grade-point averages of working and non-working freshman students. Therefore, contrary to the long held beliefs of many parents, counselors, and academic advisors, part-time employment for freshmen does not *on the average* seem to have any negative impact upon their academic performance. These findings may help allay the concerns of those who feel that freshmen students will suffer academically from part-time employment.

The results of this study complement the findings of previous research which shows that working up to fifteen or sixteen hours a week may have facilitative and positive effects on a college student. The most obvious, beneficial, and in many cases critical effect of part-time employment is the financial security that comes with the job. Students who are not eligible for financial aid (based on need) and do not have other resources to meet their college expenses may, through part-time work, be able to afford to continue their studies. For others, part-time employment can help finance educational expenses by supplementing previous earnings or the financial support received from family. On-the-job experience also exposes students to different work environments, familiarizes them with career opportunities, gives them the opportunity to accumulate references, etc. In addition, many educators feel that working may enhance a student's social development, build discipline, and develop the skills required to enter into a working world. College administrators should also be able to reap the benefits of part-time employment by employing available workers at an economical rate. This study provided an added dimension to the part-time employment picture by illustrating that students working in various types of on-campus employment (work-study, university employment, and food service) did not differ on the average among themselves in terms of end-of-the-year GPA, nor did they differ from the average non-working student.

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