

In Higher Education While Working

Researchers and policy makers in higher education have struggled to answer the following question: Does employment while enrolled in higher education have negative consequences for the student? A team of researchers recently reviewed the relevant research literature and had the following findings, among others:

1. “Overall, the empirical literature on student employment is marked by diversity and contradiction. Some studies suggested that student employment negatively affected academic performances, while others suggested that on-campus employment tended to have a different impact from off-campus employment and may have been beneficial relative to student performance and retention. In contrast, other studies concluded that on-campus employment had a negative impact. Several articles failed to differentiate between on-campus and off-campus employment...” [p.69]
2. “The impact of student employment on academic measures...has varied from positive to negative across studies. While the conclusions of studies have been varied, the estimated impact of student employment on academic performance has typically been small. However, at high levels of employment, the negative impact of employment appears more clearly evident...” [p.85]
3. “The relationship of student employment to retention appears to be considerable [sic] stronger than for academic measures such as GPA. Also, the impact of employment on retention also [sic] appears to be nonlinear. When weekly work hours become high, the number of enrollment interruptions increases significantly. However, when weekly hours are more moderate (typically 15 or fewer), enrollment interruptions actually decrease below the level of nonworking students...” [pp. 85-86]
4. “The effects of on-campus employment appear to be different from those of off-campus employment...”[p.86]
5. “...the authors suggest the following approaches for enhancement of future research...1. Use theoretical models as a basis for research efforts...2. Use statistical control strategies only in the context of a clearly specified theoretical model...3. Clarify and standardize variables and definitions...4. Broaden measures of outcome...5. Increase the breadth of analytic techniques...such as hierarchical linear modeling and structural equation modeling...6. Use descriptive and qualitative methods...7. Study smaller, more homogeneous groups...” [pp. 86-88]

Analysts concerned with degree completion, financial aid, and student services may want to review this study (which also has some details about two-year colleges). The study team, Steven C. Riggert, Joseph M. Petrosko, Daniel Ash, and Carolyn Rude-Parkins document the study in an article (“Student Employment and Higher Education: Empiricism and Contradiction”) in the journal *Review of Educational Research* (Spring 2006 issue or Vol. 76, No.1, pp. 63-92). Riggert is affiliated with Southern Indiana Rehab Hospital (in New Albany, Indiana) and Ash is affiliated with Metropolitan College (in Louisville, Kentucky). Boyle, Petresko, and Rude-Parkins are with the University of Louisville.