

**NOEL-LEVITZ WHITE PAPER**

# **Enhancing Student Success by Treating “Student Jobs” as “Real Jobs”**

**Are Campus Jobs “Real Jobs” for Students?  
Learn How These Roles Make a Difference in  
Student Success and Retention and How You  
Can Increase Their Impact**

In a time of scarce resources, many colleges and universities are looking for ways to stretch their existing resources for student success. At the same time, most institutions have a significant number of student workers. Read the latest research that describes the vital role of on-campus employment in student retention. Also, see seven specific suggestions for maximizing the return from your investment in student employees and eight ways supervisors can best help student workers.



**Noel-Levitz®**



**Most undergraduates plan to work while taking classes. Is your campus getting the most from its investment in campus jobs and are you fully recognizing the value of these jobs?**

## Student employment on campus: background and context

On college campuses large and small, in administrative offices, libraries, cafeterias, and fitness facilities, student workers have long been part of the fabric of campus life. As students earn money to pay for their education, they help meet staffing needs, gain valuable employment experience, and bring a vital and generally positive component of college life.

But are colleges and universities getting the most from their investment in student employees—and do campuses fully recognize the value of their student employment programs in student success and retention?

Before examining these questions, let’s briefly look at the overall, expanding scale of student employment:

- To help pay for college, more than 75 percent of all college students today are employed while taking classes (ACE Issue Brief, Working Their Way Through College, 2006).
- Recent research shows that 21 percent of first-year entering undergraduates planned to work 1-10 hours per week, 29 percent expected to work 11-20 hours per week, and 26 percent planned to work more than 20 hours per week. (Noel-Levitz, 2010).

While opinions vary about the overall value of student employment, the fact that most of today’s students *will* work during their college years—coupled with the researched advantages of working on campus—underscore the importance of bringing more thought, attention, and careful programming to this area.

### Time they are expecting to spend at work: Students at two-year and four-year, public and private institutions

Time expected to spend at work	Students at 4-year private institutions	Students at 4-year public institutions	Students at 2-year institutions	OVERALL national percentages
0 (I have no plans to work)	20.7%	30.9%	18.7%	23.8%
1 to 10 hours per week	25.0%	23.3%	11.9%	21.1%
11 to 20 hours per week	27.9%	30.8%	26.6%	28.6%
21 to 30 hours per week	12.4%	10.9%	21.9%	14.3%
31 to 40 hours per week	9.9%	3.3%	16.2%	9.2%
Over 40 hours per week	4.1%	0.6%	4.7%	3.0%

Overall, more than three-quarters of incoming college students plan to work while taking classes (Noel-Levitz, 2010).

## Student involvement, engagement, and success: The important role of on-campus employment in building and retaining enrollment

Student involvement on campus has been shown to be a powerful predictor of student satisfaction and likelihood to persist in college. Numerous studies have indicated that student interactions within the institutional environment—including peer relationships and activities that create a sense of belonging—increase student retention (Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1975).

Some research also indicates that students who work a moderate number of hours perform better academically than their non-working peers (Gleason, 1993). At the same time, data from various studies suggest that while working part-time *on campus* encourages social integration and positively impacts student performance (Cucaro-Alamin & Choy, 1998), working *off-campus* may be negatively associated with involvement in important aspects of learning such as interaction with faculty (Furr & Elling, 2000). The more time a student spends on campus, the more likely the student will succeed (Furr & Elling, 2006).

For many students, and especially for those newly arrived on campus, on-campus employment can be an effective way to engage students in campus life and increase their sense of identity with the institution. Students working in a particular department often develop a feeling of connectedness as they make friends with staff members and fellow student workers and take pride in their inside knowledge of the institution. Capable and trusted staff members who take an interest in students' academic progress and general well-being—but, unlike faculty members, are not involved in evaluating their course work—often become supportive mentors or even surrogate parents for students who work with them. In many cases, staff members create relationships that nurture ongoing ties to the institution.

## Advancing student learning: How campus jobs help to prepare students for the post-collegiate working world

Today's college students arrive with many skills and experiences unknown to previous generations, including advanced computer skills and the ability to navigate and use the Internet. At the same time, many have not worked with the public or developed the critical social skills that will likely be necessary for success in their careers. On-campus jobs can provide a supportive and non-threatening environment where students learn to interface comfortably with the public, understand the value of teamwork, develop time management and computer skills, and build self-esteem as they are recognized for their accomplishments.

As described by Michael Coomes (1992), meaningful campus employment helps a student to develop integrity: "The effective student employee will take the job seriously, will recognize the value of work, and will come to appreciate the need for collaboration as a means of accomplishing goals. All of these values and many others can be learned through student work." Students also report that campus jobs help them to learn to work with people who are different from themselves, understand how to operate in diverse situations, learn about themselves as individuals, achieve competence, and help others (Magolda, 1992).

Ultimately, a positive work-study experience will result in a student having gained valuable job skills and a high degree of self-confidence, as well as the motivation to continue to perform at the highest level after leaving the institution and entering the world of work. In

**With campus jobs, students automatically become involved within the campus community, resulting in greater student success and retention.**



addition, the network of relationships developed through on-campus employment continues to serve the student as he or she graduates, as supervisors provide references for students applying to graduate school or full-time jobs, thereby helping students make that critical first step in launching their careers.

### **An additional advantage: Stretching human resources on campus**

On most campuses, student employees play important roles in many areas of the institution, serving in such wide-ranging positions as tour guides for the admissions office and assistants to the physical plant staff. Indeed, as campuses tighten their budgets and seek ways to leverage resources, there is an increasing need to rely on all employees, including part-time student workers. In some cases, qualified students may even be called on to fill the gap while staff positions are vacant and assume even greater responsibility.

If well-managed, this part-time employment will engage students in the operation of the campus and create a sense of ownership commensurate with their level of responsibility and awareness of the institutional mission. In the best case scenario, these students will become effective spokespersons for the campus, representing the institution favorably in their interactions with prospective students, alumni, donors, and faculty.

### **Seven suggestions for maximizing the return from your investment in student employees**

Professionals in education are well aware that student success does not just happen on college campuses—it is dependent on the attitudes and actions of an institution and its students. In order to maximize the potential benefits of on-campus employment for students, as well as for the departments they serve and the institution as a whole, student employees and their supervisors must realize that on-campus positions are real jobs that require a serious commitment. Specifically, here are seven areas for consideration:

**Job design and placement.** Are the student jobs on your campus designed to help students grow and learn—and are students assigned to jobs that make sense for them? Ideally, students will be assigned on-campus work assignments that relate to their course of study, further enhancing satisfaction with their employment and their college experience. Institutions that truly understand the value of campus employment will create work programs that make development and growth central to students' experience as campus employees. As a starting point, consider comparing your menu of campus jobs with your list of majors/programs and with your lists of at-risk populations. Do you see opportunities to make stronger

connections? One campus has gone so far as to give top priority for its part-time jobs to students who are recognized as being at risk of attrition—those most at risk are put in a job.

**Orientation and training.** Responsibility for pre-employment training for students is often dispersed or non-existent on campuses today. Yet every campus employee should be equipped with at least some critical skills—see list on page 6. These areas, along with department-specific responsibilities, may also be used to set goals and develop competency checklists that can be reviewed with students at pre-determined intervals. An effective training and orientation

**Campus jobs can play a significant role in a student's education. Through on-campus jobs, students can learn valuable skills and build self-confidence that prepares them for their future careers.**



program for student jobs is the ideal vehicle to communicate to students key understandings about the importance of their role as representatives of your institution, and to alert them to the fact that no matter how small or insignificant their task may seem, campus jobs are real jobs that contribute to the larger goals of the institution as a whole.

**Effective supervision.** A strong supervisor will provide students with a clear sense of organizational mission, help them understand how their efforts contribute to the bigger picture, and provide positive feedback as students assume increasing responsibility and perform to a high standard. To get the most from their student employment programs, some campuses involve supervisors themselves in training to enhance their relationship-building skills and to underscore the importance of communicating expectations to students.

**Ongoing support and feedback.** At minimum, every department that employs students should be prepared to provide these workers—like all valued employees—with appropriate oversight and feedback. While an initial orientation and training session may include an entire group of students at the beginning of a term or semester, supervisors should let workers know how they are doing on an individual basis with regular feedback. It is also important to provide opportunities for students to express concerns about departmental expectations or areas of responsibility where they may need extra coaching.

**Rewards and advancement opportunities.** Like other campus employees, student employees will respond to rewards and opportunities for advancements. At four-year institutions and at institutions with graduate programs, modified “career paths” may even be designed to develop highly effective student assistants and leaders, even to the point of cultivating future full-time campus staff. Creating a balance between responsibility and support, the on-campus

employment experience can lead to maturing levels of performance, student appreciation for the growth and nurturing made possible, and, ultimately, well-rounded graduates who reflect well on the institution as they move into the world of work.

**Peer-to-peer support.** Because of the strong potential impact on student success of peer-to-peer interaction, many campuses are designing student jobs to ensure positive and beneficial support among student peers. The understanding and knowledge that can be passed on from an experienced student to a newer student is in many cases invaluable, enhancing student learning and creating an additional relationship bond. Are there additional ways your campus could be utilizing peer support?

**Student employment coordinator.** Some campuses that are seriously committed to student jobs have hired student employment coordinators who work directly with prospective student employees to match them with appropriate campus positions based on their interests and skills. As the coordinator of the campus employment program, this person is also in a position to ensure that students participate in a high-quality work experience by assisting departmental supervisors as they develop office-specific jobs and training, set clear expectations for students, and provide needed support. By guiding and monitoring on-campus employment programs, the student employment coordinator is able to establish a climate of performance excellence for the entire campus. Further, the coordinator can help the campus to connect student work experience with key institutional goals such as retention, productivity, sensitivity to diverse populations, and quality service. The student employment coordinator may also work closely with career services as an extension of the employment opportunities and internships available to students. Read how Reading Area Community College engaged student workers to champion their training program at [www.noellevitz.com/ReadingAreaCC](http://www.noellevitz.com/ReadingAreaCC).

**Institutions that truly understand the value of campus employment will create work programs that make development and growth central to students' experience as campus employees.**

**While responsibilities will vary from department to department, common elements of student worker training often include:**

- An explanation of how the department contributes to the overall mission and goals of the institution
- Supervisor expectations in terms of professional ethics, attitudes, and general work habits (e.g., dress code, how much notice is required if a student is unable to fulfill a scheduled work shift)
- The importance of providing excellent customer service in dealing with departmental clients, the public, and other campus offices
- Desired telephone and social media techniques and etiquette
- Appropriate responses to difficult situations
- The value of going the extra mile in accomplishing departmental tasks
- The necessity of observing confidentiality, especially regarding student and alumni records

**In summary**

As this paper has described, student on-campus employment bolsters the total learning experience for students and yields greater enrollment by lowering attrition. Through on-campus employment, students gain valuable skills and form important relationship bonds that make a difference in their decisions to re-enroll. Yet effective programs of student employment do not just happen; they must be carefully developed through attention to job design and placement, orientation and training, effective supervision, and other areas that accompany the hiring of any campus employee. Although often overlooked and under-valued, student employment programs offer significant advantages to campuses that are well worth considering—including the potential to develop a high-quality, responsible, and energetic part-time workforce, with all the benefits that implies.

## Eight Ways Supervisors Can Best Help Student Workers

If you supervise students, do these things consistently:

- 1. Communicate Clear Expectations**—Communicate job standards and expectations to your student employees. Written process documentation is the best reference.
- 2. Be Firm and Fair**—Maintain high standards and expectations, while recognizing that your workers are students first and campus employees second.
- 3. Give Frequent Feedback**—Frequent, positive communication boosts morale and improves performance. Feedback about errors, framed positively and with clear direction on how to prevent future errors, is essential.
- 4. Provide Training**—Focus training on essential skills and standard processes of the department. Engage students in identifying desirable work habits and how to measure performance. Offer scripts for common transactions.
- 5. Share the Vision**—Coach students on how their work fits into the function of the department and the mission of the institution.
- 6. Promote Team Spirit**—Work to develop and nurture the unique contributions of each team member, while stressing the common mission. Involve student workers in staff meetings and discuss roles and responsibilities inherent in effective teams.
- 7. Give Recognition**—Catch your student employees doing things right, and recognize them for their positive performance.
- 8. Set an Example**—Student employees take their cue from you. By exhibiting efficient, diligent work habits, you model behavior for students to emulate. Get the best out of student employees by being the best.



### For further reading

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## Questions? Want additional information?

If you have questions about this paper, or wish to schedule a complimentary consultation by phone to discuss your approach to student employee orientation, onboarding, and training, please contact Jo Hillman, Noel-Levitz senior director of retention solutions, at [Jo-hillman@noellevitz.com](mailto:Jo-hillman@noellevitz.com) or call 1-866-982-4244.

## About Noel-Levitz

A trusted partner to higher education, Noel-Levitz specializes in strategic planning for enrollment and student success. Each year, campus executives meet regularly with Noel-Levitz to accomplish their goals for student retention, student recruitment, marketing, and strategic enrollment management.

Since 1973, nearly 2,600 public and private institutions at the two-year, four-year, graduate/professional, and system levels have invited Noel-Levitz to collaborate with them on long- and short-range projects. Noel-Levitz offers complete services for strategic enrollment planning and student success, including consulting, custom research, benchmark data, assessment tools, side-by-side plan development and execution, Web strategy and e-communications support, professional development, and new enrollment technologies.

To help you achieve your goals, our 40 full-time consultants and 60 associates bring direct experience leading and planning enrollment campaigns from their previous and current positions on campuses as consultants, enrollment managers, retention directors, marketing leaders, advising directors, institutional researchers, financial aid directors, faculty, student affairs leaders, and more.

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