



**Employers and Campus Career Centers:
Building Bridges to College Student Success and Retention**

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EMPLOYERS AND CAMPUS CAREER CENTERS: BUILDING BRIDGES TO COLLEGE STUDENT SUCCESS AND RETENTION

SUMMARY

Based on research conducted at a private college in the Midwest, we propose ways that campus career centers and employers can work together to increase student retention and success by creating specific types of employment opportunities, including internships and part time jobs. This topic is timely given the current climate of escalating higher education costs.

INTRODUCTION: WHY SHOULD WE BUILD BRIDGES TOGETHER?

We are all familiar with the statistics. College admissions offices and student services offices everywhere use them as carrots in their recruitment and retention efforts – the ubiquitous bar graph illustrating the millions more in lifetime earnings college graduates can expect when compared to employees without a college degree. Access to education is a lynchpin to this success; educational institutions are viewed as meritocracies where hard work is rewarded with academic and financial achievement. Unfortunately, the cost of American higher education is increasing, and there are many students who find that access to higher education is hampered if their families cannot pay for tuition. As a result, states like Ohio and Virginia have recently enacted plans to keep college affordable. Ohio's new plan aims to address affordability and access by allowing more high school students to take free college classes and by keeping tuition at community colleges low (Okoben, 2008). The State of Virginia recently increased funding incentives to colleges that promise to cap their tuition rates (Meola, 2008).

Even when states work to make college affordable, students who matriculate must still rely on private student loans and work full- or part-time jobs to cover tuition, books, fees, and living expenses. The stress students experience is acute, and recently prompted 2,000 University of California system students to protest proposed cuts in the state's higher education budget which, if enacted, would result in higher tuition (Schevitz, 2008). Regrettably, funding options from the federal government are not pending; Congress chose not to increase access to Pell Grants, but rather increased the amount students can borrow through the Stafford loan program ("No Help", 2008). These trends, taken together,

indicate that more and more students will have to rely on private and federal student loans as well as employment to pay for their college education. Below, the consequences of student employment on student retention and success will be outlined.

CAREER SERVICES: OUR UNDERSTANDING OF COLLEGE STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

The argument of this white paper is that campus career centers and student employers must work together to improve retention and success by providing specific types of employment opportunities, such as internships and part-time jobs. This type of collaboration must be based on a sound understanding of the ways that employment affects retention and success. To understand this, the research for this paper was conducted at a private liberal arts college in the Midwest. All incoming freshmen and new transfer students were surveyed to determine how many hours per week they planned to work at the beginning of the 2005-2006 academic year. At the end of the spring 2006 semester the students' grade point averages (GPA) and retention rates were then compared to their plans to work. Almost all of the students in the survey had plans to work, while only 14% intended not to work at all. Among the 86% who planned to work 62% of them were committed to working 11 or more hours per week and 30% planned to work between 21 and 40+ hours per week (see appendix for more detail). Commonly held assumptions about student employment may lead us to believe that students who work 20 hours a week should be able to manage this schedule relatively easily. Our research did not support this assumption.

The effects of a demanding work schedule on retention and grade point average were dramatic. Students who planned to work between 1 and 10 hours per week had the highest average GPA of 2.89. In contrast, students who planned to work between 31 and 40 hours per week had the lowest average GPA of 1.58 (more details available in appendix, figure 2). Retention rates were similarly impacted, with 44% of the students who planned to work between 31 and 40 hours per week dropping out, compared with only 8% of student who planned to work between 1 and 10 hours per week. It is interesting that the students who did not plan to

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work did not have higher GPAs or retention rates than any other group, and that students who planned to work 40 hours or more per week fared only slightly worse than students in the 11-20 hour per week category (See appendix, figure 3).

Two other points of interest are generated from this research. First, students who take more credit hours tend to also have higher GPAs; many students who take 15 or more credit hours also have GPAs of 3.5 or higher. Secondly, when these results are analyzed – taking into account whether students are traditional (age 18 at the time of first enrollment) or non-traditional (older than 18 at the time of first enrollment) – we found that most non-traditional age students often plan to work between 31-40 hours per week and that traditional age students most often plan to work 11-20 hours per week. Additionally, non-traditional students tend to take fewer credit hours than do traditional students (7 and 12 credits on average, respectively). This may be an effort to compensate for the extra time spent working.

Although there are highly motivated students who are able to handle a demanding work schedule and remain in college with a high GPA, for most students the stresses and demands of this type of schedule are simply overwhelming. This research, when understood in context of others who have studied college student employment, gives employers and campus career centers clear directives in how to structure student employment so that success and retention are not sacrificed. The next section will cover other contributions to this understanding drawn from student services research.

WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS

Vincent Tinto (1993) sees employment as something that can detract from a student's ability to integrate into the fabric of the institution, simply by reducing the amount of time they have available for schoolwork and participation in campus events. He notes that this problem becomes even more complicated for adult students and commuters, but that there are two important caveats. The first is how a student's employer views education, and the second is how often they actually work. Tinto notes Astin's work that shows working full-time is most detrimental to academic persistence, but working part-time and on campus can actually help a student

succeed, mainly by encouraging integration into the campus community and facilitating more interaction.

In the eyes of Astin (1993), employment is just one of the things that affect student satisfaction with a particular institution. His focus is that "by increasing our understanding of how particular student outcomes are affected by particular environmental experiences, we substantially enhance our capacity to create more effective institutions and programs" (1993).

In the context of our study institution, Astin shows a mixed bag of results. Working at a full-time job is associated with uniformly negative outcomes, such as: completion of the bachelor's degree, graduating with honors, enrollment in graduate or professional school, and willingness to re-enroll at the same college. Working full-time positively affects status striving and the goal of being financially very well-off. He said that at an institution where many students work off campus could create an atmosphere where the peer culture has few negative repercussions for dropping out (1993).

REAL WORLD EXPERIENCES

As an employer, you want students that are motivated to succeed, and ones who will be able to finish college and become successful employees. But have you ever thought that perhaps that could be too motivated? For many students, the idea of a well-paying job in the future helps to motivate them in class. Leppel (2005) brings up a good point. Why is it that students who value future financial success highly leave college at a much higher rate?

Leppel used data from the 1990 Beginning Postsecondary Students survey to illustrate the interaction between the importance placed on financial success and relative value of current and future income, and how all of these factors influence student retention. She found that students who idealize being very well-off financially or having a good income within a few years after graduation are less likely to be retained for a second year at the same institution, and tend to discount future benefits at a higher rate (2005). Leppel speculates that the students in this particular group may have chosen majors that appear to be more lucrative but are not a

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good fit for the student as a whole. As a remedy, she suggests that institutions should focus on providing appropriate academic support services to ensure that students have learned necessary skills, and are able to develop productive contacts for life after college.

She also advocates a close relationship between the student and the career services office. In that case, the career services office can provide assessment tools and advice that helps the student delineate how their interests are best suited to specific majors, and to understand that it is likely to be better working at a job they enjoy, rather than one that is simply lucrative.

HOW CAN YOU HELP BUILD BRIDGES WITH YOUR STUDENTS AND THEIR INSTITUTIONS?

Here are the guidelines we found to ensure student success:

- Student employment (whether part time jobs or internship/co-ops) should be between 11 and 20 hours per week when students are taking a full load of college classes. Tinto and Astin found that 20 hours per week is the upper limit of hours students could work and still feel sufficiently engaged in the campus and their work. We found that students who work more than 11 hours per week tended to have lower average GPAs and lower retention rates.
- Our research showed that the more credits students take the higher GPA they earn. Structuring your internships as a credit-bearing opportunity allows for additional oversight and faculty/staff involvement, which can help make this a more institutional experience for the student.
- Today's students need a great deal of clear direction, especially when it comes to their orientation process. Based on an InternBridge, Inc. survey of more than 12,000 college students, they need the most help in meeting their peers, understanding employer expectations, figuring out how to network within the company, and learning how frequently previous interns have received employment offers (InternBridge Webinar).

- Connection with career services. The career services office is your guide to the campus. They can work with you to help you understand the requirements that students must meet to earn credit, provide you with exposure, direct you to the resources you need, as well as assist with providing students constructive feedback on performance.

MAKING THOSE BRIDGES STRONG

We all know that generational factors are conspiring to put the squeeze on employers. With the transition of baby boomers out of the workplace and the unequal numbers of Millennial students to replace them, working with students while they are still in school is even more important. The competition is tough and about to get even tougher, especially in healthcare and technology fields.

The numbers are clearly in the Millennials' favor. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 79.8 million people who qualify as Millennials, born between 1977 and 1995 (Hira, 2007). They make up 22% of the workforce, ("In the Workplace", 2008) and are swelling the number of high school and college students. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, the number of new graduates is expected to peak this year at 3.34 million. It is then expected to decline gradually until 2015, when the growing Hispanic and Asian populations will begin pushing it to new high (Ashburn, 2008).

So what do you need to do to make your organization an attractive option? Among many suggestions in "Recruit or Die: How Any Business Can Beat The Big Guys in the War for Young Talent," some are: communicate a clear path through the company; how working with the company can open future doors; how interns and future hires can develop their skills, recognize their work early and often, and provide clear feedback as well.

CONCLUSION: WHY STUDENT EMPLOYMENT MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

The upheaval in the general economy these days is beginning to claim a new casualty: student loans and financial aid. With the tightening of the credit markets and removal of a federal subsidy to lenders, more than 55 lenders (Luhby, 2008) have

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dropped out of the federal loan program, including big names such as Chase and Citibank. The impact of these actions could be significant on students. Many lenders are reducing or eliminating the ability to consolidate loans at graduation, and some lenders are tightening lending criteria, such as student credit ratings and the graduation rate of institutions (Field, 2008).

With an average indebtedness of over \$19,000 at graduation, (“The Project”, 2007) students are struggling more than ever to manage their loans and pursue their professional lives. Our research has shown that working moderate amounts of time is beneficial to students, but the pressure of loan repayment easily forces students into a gray area. By working with students and colleges to build an internship or employment relationship, you can offer another way for students to achieve their overall goal of earning an education.

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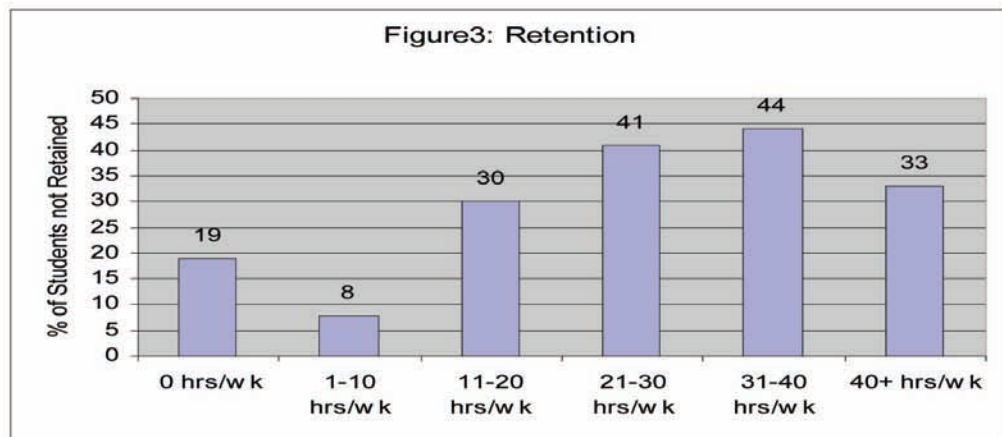
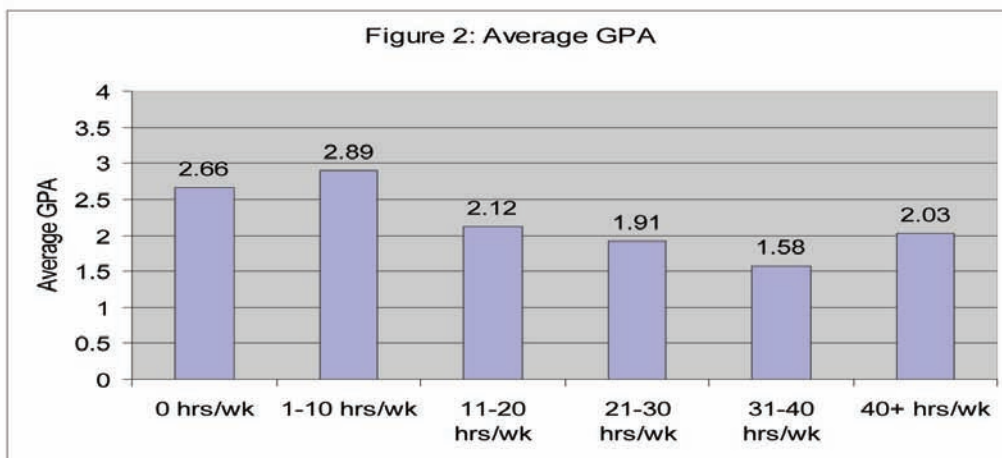
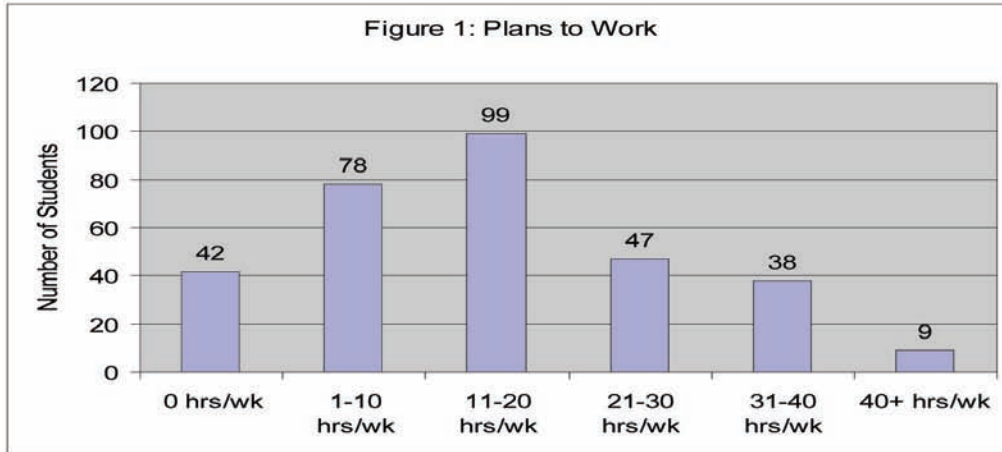
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APPENDIX - FIGURES



INTERN BRIDGE

THE INTERNSHIP AND COLLEGE RECRUITMENT EXPERTS



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WORKSHOP DVD**



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