

WORKING EXPERIENCE: MAXIMIZING THE FEDERAL WORK-STUDY (FWS)

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by

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Graduate and Professional Studies in Education

Abstract  
of  
WORKING EXPERIENCE: MAXIMIZING THE FEDERAL WORK-STUDY (FWS)  
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*Brief Literature Review*

The literature points out two important concepts: the benefit from working and attending college and challenges associated with working while attending college. A Federal Work-Study (FWS) job can provide a student with effective time management strategies. For some students, their FWS job is their first experience learning how to manage school and work. As more students are employed, they face having to balance their academic requirements, extracurricular activities, and employment responsibilities to maintain their lifestyles (Scott-Clayton, 2011).

*Statement of the Problem*

The focus of this study was to determine the following: What factors, in addition to financial aid assistance, are provided to eligible students in the FWS program; the relevant learning students acquire from participating in a FWS program; and the types of benefits students recognize they received from participating in a FWS program. Additionally, it examined the ways in which the FWS experience might be structured to maximize the academic life experience benefits to participating students.

### *Methodology*

In this quantitative study, respondents were asked to answer closed-ended and multiple-choice questions independently and voluntarily. Five initial questions were posed to gain demographic information: age range, sex, ethnicity, current grade level, and grade level at the start of their FWS employment. The survey was administered solely online, via SurveyMonkey, also used to collect, record, and summarize results.

### *Conclusions and Recommendations*

Students participate in the FWS program for many reasons. The data from the students who participated in the FWS program indicated the extent to which their FWS experience helped them develop skills. The FWS employers also had an impact on the students' career development. Respondents provided advice to future FWS students. Recommendations include helping FWS students become engaged in activities that encourage active and collaborative learning and foster positive interaction between students, employers, and faculty members. Additionally, campus leaders should also consider intentionally designing active collaboration learning experiences for FWS students that also appear to be linked with more frequent student-employer interactions.

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
Geni Cowan, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## DEDICATION

I would have not been able to do this without the support of my family.

Mom and Dad – Gracias por dar me luz. Siempre me voy a mejorar. Thank you for always pushing me to do better in anything and everything that I do. Los quiero mucho!

Ruben, Juan, Sal and Erik – your children have been my motivation to show them that education is important. Thank you for always supporting me throughout my life.

Christine, Chris, and Katrina – I've always wanted to be a great role model for you and I hope that I have done that. Thank you for being my teacher as well and giving me the love and support through my educational journey and life.

To my nieces and nephews – This educational journey has taught me to work hard, stay focused, and to be a leader in anything and everything I do. It has also helped me be proud of what I have become and to make a difference within myself.

To Johnny, Maricella, and my future seeds of life – I've worked hard and never gave up. You were my motivation to complete this life goal and I made sacrifices and struggles but succeeded.

Johnny – Thank you for always pushing me; and motivating me always do better and to just get it done! Yes, I'm finally done! Amo!

To my god children – stay focused on your life goals and you will be successful in anything you do. I'm here for you when you need me.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Overview**

Students either work full-time or part-time to pay for their educational costs, which include more than just tuition. Educational costs vary among students, depending on if they are dependent or independent students, and additional educational costs are books, supplies, food, housing, and other educational expenses they experience during their academic career. Students working for pay while attending college is the norm in American higher education (Pike, Kuh, & Massa-McKinley, 2008). In addition to paying educational costs, students gain valuable experience for career exploration and development through student employment. Working on campus creates a meaningful work experience for students, a key element in an overall strategy designed to foster student enhancement and success (Lederman, 2009). A student will develop professional and personal organizational skills. Ultimately, jobs provide students with the opportunity to utilize their work experience and contribute to society while still attending school. A number of researchers also found that hard work builds stronger academic character because it teaches the students time-management skills, gives them experience outside the classroom, and provides them with more satisfaction in college (Pennington, Zvonkovic, & Wilson, 1989). Students will be able to use their professional and personal skills obtained throughout their college work experience and apply it to any job while in

or out of school. Previous work experience can be applied to any future work experience a student may come across. Working is an important element of many students' college experiences. Working gives students dignity and a feeling as if they are a part of something and will help with their personal development.

Federal Work-Study (FWS) was created by the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964, which was designed to increase employment opportunities, and was later transferred to the Higher Education Act of 1965 "to stimulate and promote the part-time employment of students . . . who are in need of the earnings from such employment to pursue courses of study at eligible institutions" (Legal Information Institute, n.d., para. 1). FWS provides part-time jobs for undergraduate and graduate students with financial need, allowing them to earn money to help pay for education expenses. The program encourages community service work and work related to the student's course of study (Federal Student Aid, n.d.). The FWS program provides students with the opportunity to learn through practical experiences, which can prepare them for the future workforce. FWS is a grant based on the student's financial need and is a subsidy that is beneficial to the student and educational institution; but not everyone eligible for the program gets to participate.

McCormick, Moore, and Kuh (2010) found that working either on campus or off campus is positively connected to several aspects of student engagement, particularly for full-time students. As more students are employed, they face having to balance their academic requirements, extracurricular activities, and employment responsibilities to

maintain their lifestyles (Furr & Elling, 2000). Students do not have very many options if they are solely dependent upon their financial aid. During the academic year, students are given the opportunity to work while going to school; however, they need to meet certain requirements in order to work under the FWS program. One important factor is academics come first and student academic progress standards are evaluated prior to being hired in a FWS position. Each institution establishes policies governed by the University system and must follow Federal and State regulations.

This allowing FWS, when combined with other support, may encourage college access, discussion of its benefits generally emphasized its potential role in promoting student persistence after entry, as well as installing values and skills that may be directed beneficially to future employment. (Scott-Clayton, 2011, p. 507)

The Financial Aid Office is responsible for administering the FWS funds to eligible students. Students are then given the option to accept or decline the FWS that has been granted to them. The FWS funds allotted to students are then paid to them in a monthly paycheck by their employers.

Unlike the Pell Grant and Stafford Loans, FWS funds are not distributed directly to students, but instead are allocated in block amounts to institutions based on a historical formula. As a result, some institutions receive substantially more FWS funding per eligible students than others. (Scott-Clayton, 2011, p. 508)

Students are expected to exhaust all of their FWS funds granted and at times can be awarded additional FWS. After FWS students have exhausted their FWS award, and depending on the employer's needs and budget, the FWS students may be hired as a student assistant. The intent of the FWS was to generate employment opportunities for low-income students (Perna, 2012).

A large number of college students work while going to school, as it is part of their own personal developmental growth in higher education. For the many students and their families without resources to pay the higher costs, financial aid was the key to their children having an opportunity for college. If financial aid is inadequate or too complicated to be understood and to work, then the educational tools essential for the present generation of students are going to be rationed on the basis of class and color (Orfield, 2011).

Some employment during college is not harmful, and working on campus can often connect a student more deeply with college. But there is a serious tradeoff if students work too much. When that happens, they cannot study as much or as well as is necessary, so they learn less and their grades and chances of completion are impacted. For years, research has suggested that going *beyond* 15 hours per week, about equal the two full days of work, is harmful to academic success. We see, however, that many students are far beyond this point and a significant number are trying to both work and study full-time, something that puts unreasonable pressure on students and seriously cuts deeply into the value of college education and a student's chance of success.

We have to commend students for the tremendous effort they are making, but also recognize that this situation is harmful and involves tremendous stress at time students have extremely important things to do, namely finding and preparing for a career and their adult lives. (Orfield, 2011, p. 2)

Each FWS position is critical to employers, as some of the positions provide mentoring and tutoring to elementary, middle, and high school students. Students are also employed within the institutions and are an advantage to it due to being closely involved on campus. Some of the personal lessons learned by students through work experience provide them with overall personal and professional development. With the rising cost of tuition fees, students are looking for ways to earn money to pay for additional educational expenses throughout their educational career. It is important for FWS employers to ensure students are gaining a meaningful educational experience through working. The work skills are essential for gaining employment and for having a vast knowledge of life skills and personal qualities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The focus of this study was to determine what factors in addition to financial aid assistance the Federal Work-Study (FWS) program provided to eligible students. The study also explored relevant learning students acquired from participating in a FWS program as well as the type of benefits students felt they received from their participation in a FWS program. Additionally, it examined the ways in which the FWS experience



might be structured to maximize the academic life experience benefits to participating students. Specifically, the research sought to address the following questions:

1. What do students receiving FWS identify as relevant learning acquired from their participation in a FWS program?
2. What benefit do affected students recognize from their participation in a FWS program?
3. What are some of the ways in which the FWS experience might be structured to maximize the academic/life experience benefit to participating students?

### **Definition of Terms**

#### Educational Expenses

Tuition fees, books, transportation, housing, and any other educational costs

#### Federal Work-Study

A federally financed program that arranges for students to combine employment and college study; the employment may be an integral part of the academic program (as in cooperative education or internships) or simply a means of paying for college (Legal Information Institute, n.d.).

#### Graduates

Students working towards obtaining a master's or doctorate degree

### Grants

Need-based aid granted to low-income and middle-income undergraduate students to cover educational expenses depending on the cost of attendance

### Off-Campus Employment

Any type of paid work in which the place of employment is located off the campus of the institution that the students attend and the employer is not the institution.

### Title IV

Federally funded program that administers financial aid such as grants, loans, and work-study

### Undergraduate

Students working towards obtaining a bachelor's degree

## **Significance of the Study**

Not accounting for the amount of time actually put into the job, researchers have found that the type of employment a student holds has an impact on academics. Dead-end jobs such as cashier or fast food workers tend to have a negative effect (Li-Chen & Wooster, 1979). Whereas high-quality, part-time jobs that seem to develop career-related skills may in effect contribute to increased levels of "career maturity," and these types of jobs are more likely to be flexible and work with students' schedules (Wantanabe, 2005, p. 39). Studies examined the effects of college students and employment on academic

achievement; presently, 55% to 80% of students are employed while attending college (King, 1998; Miller, 1997). Paid employment is an important resource for many students while undergoing the college experience. According to Steinberg and Dornbusch (1991), it is not the job itself that causes the problem, but the overload on the amount of time worked because “students who work more hours each week spend less time on homework [and] pay attention in class less often” (p. 307). Students will learn skills that can benefit them in advancing through their career. In team-orientated workplaces such as higher education institutions, the development of good interpersonal communication skills is an important key to success. Developing interpersonal skills can also lead to developing a work ethic. Apart from balancing, managing, and knowing skills, it can lead to the opportunity to network and obtain a job. Networking provides students with an idea of how to approach successful professions and allows them to present themselves without feeling intimidated.

The focus of the literature was more on academic achievement rather than on gained knowledge and or the experience of having a job. Much of the literature reviewed identified students as not receiving enough financial aid or financial aid support from home to assist with the college expenses and the reason for having to work while in school. There continue to be positive and negative factors for students working while attending school. Studies in the literature indicated that obtaining some type of employment had an impact on academic achievement. Research related to student employment, including both on and off campus, over the past 20 years reported both the

positive and negative effects of student employment citing correlations between specific numbers of hours worked on student GPA, persistence, graduation rates, and level of debt upon graduation (Astin, 1993; Bradburn, 2002; Furr & Elling, 2000; King & Bannon, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pike et al., 2008).

Research also suggests that a student employed during college is related to acquiring skills that are preferred by the employer. Identifying the effects of work on college students has many implications and even though numerous studies have been conducted, little research could be found that examined the impact of the FWS program and the potential benefits to the student (Astin, 1993). It has been well documented that the more engaged students are, both inside and outside the classroom, the greater their opportunities to gain support and encouragement (Astin, 1993). Such engagement contributes to student success. Educational researchers have shown that frequent, meaningful interactions between students and their employers are important to learning and personal development (Astin, 1977, 1985, 1993; Bean, 2005; Kuh et al., 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1981; Tinto, 1993).

The FWS program provides students with practical work experience as well as financial aid, and the potential benefits derived from this experience should be recognized to provide students with the ability to learn general job-related skills. Under the best of circumstances, work-study jobs can provide students with a chance to explore career opportunities to gain a better understanding of how knowledge gained in school is applied to a job after graduation. It may even lead to an offer of a permanent position.

### **Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Following this section, Chapter 2 offers a review of related literature discussing the theoretical frameworks that support the need for this research as well as other contributors impacting a student's FWS college educational and work experience. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology and data collection and analysis processes. The results of the survey are highlighted in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study along with conclusions, recommendations, and implications for future research.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an understanding of the student employment experience within higher education. The Federal Work-Study (FWS) program was originally enacted as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and later transferred to the Higher Education Act of 1965, “to stimulate and promote the part-time employment of students . . . who are indeed of the earnings from such employment to pursue courses of study at eligible institutions” (Legal Information Institution, n.d., para. 1). This chapter also introduces theoretical frameworks that provide a compelling foundation for research on the importance of working a FWS job while attending college. “By the 1970s, the federal government had become the largest source of direct assistance to individual students for financing their college expenses” (Altbach, Berdahl, & Gumport, 2005, p. 165). A brief explanation of Arthur W. Chickering’s seven vectors of student development (1969) along with Vincent Tinto’s (1975) college connectedness and Astin’s (1984) Student Involvement Theory is included. The definition of college connectedness is central to this concept and is further discussed in this chapter. This chapter explores what research is suggested for better understanding student college work experience and can be utilized by students, faculty, staff, and administration. Lastly, understanding the employment context in which FWS students are involved during their

education experience is imperative to promoting students' self-development to prepare for and obtain the future work that is ahead.

### **A Historical Perspective**

Grants, loans, and Federal Work-Study have long been used to help students and their families meet the costs of higher education. In *American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century*, Altbach et al. (2005) stated:

Starting with the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, or GI Bill, federal student assistance has helped transform attending college in America from an elite to a mass activity. Congress passed the GI Bill to reward veterans who had served their country during wartime and to help them catch up with their peers whose lives had not been interrupted by military services. During the 1940s and 1950s, the GI Bill sent thousands of men and women to college who otherwise would not have had the opportunity. (p. 174)

About 40 percent of 19 million students who attend postsecondary education each year are estimated to receive some federal aid, in the form of grants, loans, or work/study programs.<sup>5</sup> . . . The big breakthrough, however, came during the crest of the civil right movement and War on Poverty of the mid-1960s. As part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, the Higher Education Act of 1965 embodied, for the first time, an explicit federal commitment to equalizing college opportunities for needy students . . . The Legislation also authorized Federal-

Work Study to subsidize the employment of needy college students and the federally guaranteed student loan program to ease the cash-flow problems of middle income college student and their families. (Altbach et al., 2005, pp. 174-175)

The Bush administration is committed to expanding opportunities established during the Clinton administration for students to pay for their education by serving the nation or community...In addition, the 1993 legislation modified the Federal Work-Study program to require institutions to direct 5 percent of their work-study allocations to fund employment in community services. In 1998, that set-aside was increased to 7 percent with in additional requirement to support literacy programs. (Altbach et al., 2005, p. 184)

Student employment is the most common non-classroom experience among college students, with primarily undergraduate students working part-time (Kuh, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). More attention needs to be focused on intentionally linking experiences within the overall college learning experience (Kuh, 2009; Perozzi, 2009). The workplace is valuable in providing students with an informative working experience (Conrad, 2008). Muldoon (2009) set to discover if students developed desirable skills and attributes while participating in part-time work and if institutional recognition of such student development was valued by the students themselves as well as employers. Students in the research where asked why they worked. It is understood that earning money is the primary motivation for having a part-time job (Muldoon, 2009).



“Also mentioned were the opportunity to develop work skills such as customer service skills, teamwork skill and skills in people management and communications” (Muldoon, 2009, p. 241). Students are given the opportunity to work and attend school; thus, an on-campus job may strengthen students’ attachment to the institution, which may increase persistence (Muldoon, 2009). Tinto’s (1975) theory of student persistence suggests that social integration occurs: “it is entirely possible for individuals to achieve integration in the academic system of the college without doing so in the social domain” (p. 120). Additionally, Tinto found that students who do not become socially integrated may or may not suffer from persistence issues, depending on the individual. Therefore, failure to become involved in campus activities, organizations, and extracurricular activities, which promote involvement and integration of college life, can lead to higher chances of attrition for some students. Integration is an important process of a student’s college experience. Part of a student’s educational experience is adapting to the institution and utilizing its resources in order to succeed. Students are able to apply themselves and adapt to the culture of the institution. The 1972 National Longitudinal Study dealt with educational and work experience in terms of how well “educational experience prepared young people for their work” and the financial considerations (U.S. Department of Education as cited in Tanaka, 2002, p. 272). The survey was directed at career goals, work experience, and other factors steering a student toward a productive life as a working member of society (Tanaka, 2002).

## **Student Development**

While support services are expensive to set up and do not always attract the number of students expected, the evidence is that they are very important. But even more important than the money spent on support services is the instructional culture – support of learning must be emphasized (Pike, Smart, Kuh, & Hayek, 2006; Porter, 2006).

Pittaway and Moss (2006) found that orientation processes were important in helping students settle into academic life, as they helped students to connect socially with peers, mentors, and staff to gain familiarity with the campus and clarify expectations of academic study. Krause (2005) found that the proportion of students in paid employment increased from 51% to 55% in five years; 57% said paid work interfered with their academic performance; and paid workers were more likely to consider withdrawing and spent less time on campus. Yorke (2006) also placed student engagement in the forefront, differentiating between students' performance goals and learning goals. Student engagement is dependent upon student performance goals and their learning goals. Students will not engage if they are performing below academic standards, and if they are not meeting their own learning expectations, they will not want to engage in the university. Since that time, several scholars studying financial aid – St. John, Hu, and Weber (2001), for example – have suggested that one of the positive effects of college work-study might be that it helps students “integrate into higher education communities and further help[s] increase student persistence” (p. 423). “Overall, the evidence suggests that college work-study exerts a positive influence on student persistence, but

the relative strength of the effect of work-study remains unclear” (Hossler, Zisken, Gross, Kim, & Cekic, 2009, p. 405). College work-study does have a positive impact on student integration and needs to be reviewed further.

### **Student Involvement**

With the various theories that exist regarding student development, one predominant theory regarding student employment is Astin’s (1984) theory of involvement. The student involvement theory is used to put student employment into perspective in terms of academic achievement and identity development. Astin (1984) defined student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 297). The theory poses that the students who are actively involved in their education will enjoy greater success academically and developmentally while deriving greater satisfaction with their institutions and experience. Astin also described involvement as being similar to motivation with the advantage of being more easily observed and measured and less abstract, thus making possible the study of student development. The time and effort students expend are the greatest resources in the development. The resulting findings have been summarized in two recent reviews that conclude that although off-campus employment appears to have negative effects, on-campus jobs may positively influence persistence and completion (Hossler et al., 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students begin to spend less time studying, if working, but in the same perspective, students working can enhance the college experience.

### **Chickering's Seven Vectors of Development**

It is important to examine and understand Chickering's seven vectors of development. The purpose of the seven vectors was to illustrate how a student's development in the college setting can affect him or her emotionally, socially, physically, and intellectually in a college environment, particularly in the formation of identity (De Larrosa, n.d.). As a primary aspect of his theory, he also emphasized that universities encourage the development of human potential (Garfield & David, 1986). Changes that occur for a particular student do not necessarily occur for all students (Chickering, 1969). Chickering's seven vectors development were first published in 1969, when the growth of student development theories was on the rise (Chickering, 1969). In 1993, the theory was revised and updated and includes the following: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The purpose for why one attends college varies and depends on career goals, personal aspirations, and commitments to family and others. Decisions must be made to learn to balance these career goals, personal aspirations, and commitments to family and self (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Integrity of one's belief's, values, and purpose must be established. Also, thinking about others' beliefs and points of view and the willingness to preserve self-respect while monitoring behaviors are important in college student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

### **The Problem of Paying for College**

In the 2008 report prepared by the Institute of Higher Education Policy, the Federal government has an extensive history of investigating federal resources in financial aid assistance and other programs that have expanded higher education opportunities for persons outside the wealthy elite (McSwain, 2008). All students who enroll in postsecondary education today contend with tuition and fees that have risen faster than inflation. Within just the past 10 years, the published tuition fees at public 4-year colleges and universities rose by 4.4% annually after inflation adjustment (College Board, 2007).

Although they come to diametric conclusions, sociological research on parental investment – particularly within status attainment and human capital traditions – shares basic assumption with moral hazard theory. Both approaches suggest that students are able and willing to maximize resources that parents provide. As utilitarian actors, students either use parental investments to increase their human capital and optimize their future socioeconomic status, or they strategically limit academic effort the extent that they can avoid personal responsibility for the economic cost of their behavior. (Hamilton, 2013, p. 89)

To establish FWS eligibility, a student must file a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and enroll in a Title IV-eligibility (i.e., federal student aid) postsecondary institution . . . Using a complex formula based on primarily on family income, as well as assets, family size, and number in college, an “expected

family contribution” (EFC) is computed. If the student’s total cost of attendance (include living expenses) exceeds the EFC, the student is deemed to have financial need. (Scott-Clayton 2011, p. 508)

At times, those who have attended college do not have or receive adequate parental support. It can either be physically and or financially. Some families struggle to pay for their student education. Also some parents refuse to provide financial support in helping their student with their educational costs. This is a problem many students face when determining how their education is going to be paid. In the study conducted by Hornak, Farrell, and Jackson, “Making It (Or Not) on a Dime in College: Implications for Practice,” when it came to students’ financial decision making, they concluded the:

students’ learning experiences illustrated the financial hardship in college can impact engagement, well-being, relationships, return rates, and ultimately, graduation rates as students struggled to meet the rising costs to attend college each year . . . All of the students in the study stated that going to school was a choice they made, but for them working while in school was mandatory. (p. 491)

Students do not all have the same opportunities, which can cause different college experiences. Hamilton (2013) concluded that parents often assume the best way to direct their money is toward their children’s college education, but there is little empirical knowledge of how parental funds shape students’ performance during college.

The expected family contribution (EFC) was introduced in 1972 to serve as a measure of a family’s ability to pay postsecondary expenses from its own resources

(Wolanin, 2003). An EFC is calculated for each student using a formula that takes into account the income, available assets, living expenses, federal income tax liability, retirement needs, and other expenses for the student and his or her family (Stedman, 2003). This can affect the Expected Family Contribution (EFC), minimizing the maximum amount of financial aid, which in this case would be need-based aid. Students will turn to non-need based aid to assist with the cost of their education, which can cause loan indebtedness. For students who are financially dependent on their parents, the resources of both student and parents are used to determine the EFC (Steadman, 2003). There is a necessity for students having to work when their parents are unwilling or unable to help them pay for their educational expenses. In the absence of sufficient grant aid, students who do not have family financial support can enroll part-time, diminishing the chances that they will complete their degree; thus, they can attempt to supplement their federal loans (Baum, 2010).

### **Inadequacy of Personal Resources**

Students are dependent on their parents to assist with the cost of education. Not all students have the work experience after graduating from high school and will turn to continuing their education.

The disparity between the steady rise in college tuition and the meager rise in family income leaves a significant difference between family contributions and the actual cost of attending college. The experiences of students who lack adequate financial support through their families or financial aid differ greatly

from other students. Many students must work during the school year. (Hornak et al., 2010, p. 481)

In their study, Hornak et al. (2010) analyzed the experiences of college students with significant unmet needs who must earn an income while attending college full-time. Although some share of students may work to finance lifestyle choices, many students must work to pay for their educational expenses. Almost half of full-time undergraduates and 81% of part-time undergraduates are employed while enrolled in college (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

As the price of college increases, more students are certain to find work as a necessity rather than a choice (Baum, 2010). The focus of Baum's research was the relationship between student aid and student work, in particular the role of the FWS in increasing students' ability to pay for college. It is clear that if work-study makes an important contribution to students' college experiences, a much larger program would be required to make a meaningful difference (Baum, 2010). A student's decision to work while attending school has both pros and cons. On the positive side, the experience gained from working may have an impact on an individual's future earning ability (Peng & Yang, 2010). Students working for pay while attending college are the norm in American higher education. The most recent national data indicate that 68% of all college students work for pay during the academic year, and one-third of these students work more than 20 hours per week (Pike et al., 2008).



Hornak et al. (2010) identified the challenges to securing college financing, and those students with no job and seeking found it difficult because (a) they did not know how to navigate the hiring system on campus, (b) they were not awarded FWS money (some did not know how to request it), (c) they were picky and did not want to take a job they deemed undesirable (e.g., food service employee), (d) they were feeling overwhelmed, or (e) they were getting involved in other activities (e.g., student clubs). The other students found jobs easily on campus through FWS, networking, or searching for jobs that were available. Since most of the students were not working part-time jobs on campus, their wages were low and they were limited to a maximum of 29 hours scheduled per week (Hornak et al., 2010). The students in the study also identified their expertise and knowledge of the financial aid system.

A few were knowledgeable about the financial aid process, including how to complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and how to work with in institution's financial aid office; however, more than half did not know how to navigate the financial aid system. (p. 487)

Several dependent students, who had little family assistance, had difficulty understanding paperwork and how the financial aid systems functioned.

The FWS program is one of many federally funded programs administered by the Department of Education. In 2007-2008, the program provided approximately \$1.1 billion in assistance to nearly 700,000 students (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Unlike Pell Grant or Stafford Loans, FWS funds are not distributed directly to students, but instead are allocated in block amounts to institutions based on a historical formula. As a result, some institutions receive substantially more FWS per eligible student than others. (Scott-Clayton, 2011, p. 508)

The combinations of financial aid programs offered to students are not always accepted by students who have the option to accept a loan for declining FWS. FWS was integrated into the federal student aid system developed by the Higher Education Act that was signed by law in 1965. The intent of FWS was to generate employment opportunities for low-income students. Student financial aid packages include FWS jobs as one component of funding intended to meet financial need to make college enrollment possible (Baum, 2010). The relationship between work and grant eligibility is seen by comparing the Pell Grant funds received by students with similar income but different work patterns (Baum, 2010). Unlike with grants and Stafford loans, students are allowed to postpone payment for their education; work allows students to earn the funds they need to pay their own college expenses.

The challenges to securing college financing fall on the student and families. In “Making it (or Not) on a Dime in College” by Hornak et al. (2010), the study focused on understanding the levels of engagement, involvement, and decisions traditionally aged students make during their years based on their financial circumstance. The research was presented in three themes: academic cost of financial hardship and working; social cost of financial and working; and emotional cost of financial hardship and working. Seventy-

four percent of students in the study said they were expected to have a job while going to college. Thirty percent of the students received FWS, but many did not know about the FWS option.

Each university must follow the rules and regulations placed by the Department of Education in monitoring the academic progress of students.

An ideal situation for undergraduates who must work during college would allow student to take a full course load, to work approximately 12 hours a week, and to be fully engaged in college academics and activities with out the burden of financial aid insecurity. (Hornak et al., 2010, p. 483)

The fact that most college students spend significant time working for pay is a serious concern for educators and policy makers because conventional wisdom holds that working while attending college dilutes students effort and results in lower grades. (Pike et al., 2008, p. 561)

Federal regulations require a university to establish, publish, and apply standards to monitor progress toward the completion of a certificate or degree program. Devadoss and Foltz (1996) investigated the few factors that might influence a university student's class performance and attendance; they concluded that hours worked during the school year on jobs outside of class have a negative impact on both class attendance and student performance.

The consequences of Federal Work-Study are theoretically ambiguous. It is not difficult to hypothesize why student employment in general may harm academic

outcomes: It competes for time and homework and class scheduling. But if the FWS increases students access to convenient jobs, the additional earnings may help alleviate credit constraints and thus prevent students from dropping out entirely. (Scott-Clayton, 2011, p. 507)

If students fail to meet the standards, they will be placed on financial aid warning or suspension. Students' academic performance must meet the Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) standards implemented within the university. Per the Department of Education, universities need to evaluate the quality and quantity. Students having to complete their degree or certificate program and within a certain period of time is also dependent upon the student's program. The objective for a student is to identify the program they are interested in and complete the required number of units to earn their degree or certificate. The second objective is the student needs a passing percentage of attempted units as set by the university. In 1981 a report by the Comptroller General to the Chairman on Labor and Human Resources, universities were administering financial aid to students without meeting the SAP requirements. Stinebrickner and Stinebrickner (as cited in Scott-Clayton, 2011) found that students who work more because they were assigned to a high-availability job earn significantly lower GPAs, a decline of about .162 points per additional hour of work. Because of data limitations, the authors were unable to examine longer term outcomes (Scott-Clayton, 2011).

Despite the fact that many higher education believe that working for pay hinders student success, research has failed to find a consistent relationship between work

and grades...that is grades will actually improve if students work part time and then decline as the number of hours worked approaches full-time employment. (Pike et al., 2008, p. 561)

### **Challenges Associated with Working While Attending College**

Hansen, in the 1986 article “Alternatives to Borrowing: How Colleges are Helping Student Avoid Debt,” stated:

Educators and public officials have for decades shared the belief that working up to fifteen or twenty hours a week is unlikely to harm the educational process and in fact may enhance it by giving students the chance to relate their learning to the world of working and by fostering habits and values that are important in both areas. (p. 23)

Some employment during college is not harmful and working on campus can often connect a student more deeply with college. But there is a serious tradeoff if students work too much. When that happens, then they cannot study as much or as well as is necessary, so they learn less and their grades and chances of completion are impacted. (Orfield, 2011, Forward, p. 2)

The negative impacts of working long hours (anywhere from 16 to 20 hours to over 35 hours, depending upon the study) for students include: inhibited cognitive development (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Serra Hagedorn, & Terrenzini, 1998), lowered grades and GPAs (Kulm & Cramer, 2006; Orszag, Orszag, & Whitmore, 2001), limited

class schedules and choices (King & Bannon, 2002; Orszag et al., 2001), limited participation in both extra-curricular and social activities (Kulm & Cramer, 2006), limited library access (Orszag et al., 2001), limited study time (Kulm & Cramer, 2006), and an increased likelihood of dropping out of college (American Council on Education, 2006; Orszag et al., 2001). The time spent working will directly influence grades; working more hours can minimize the amount of time available for students to study and engage in educational activities, which can then lead to studying less, and not engaging in educational activities can lead to lower grades (Pike et al., 2008). Studies of the relationship between working for pay and college grades have produced mixed results (Riggert, Boyle, Petrosko, Ash, & Rude-Parkins, 2006). Researchers identified that students' work experiences are significantly related to their levels of engagement in educationally purposeful activities, and the relationships have important consequences for the indirect relationships between work and grades (Pike et al., 2008).

For student affairs staff and other professional involved in student employment and concerned with student success, these results indicate that students should be strongly encouraged to work no more than 20 hours a week to minimize the potential negative consequences of work on grades. (Pike et al., 2008, p. 576)

### **Benefits of Working While Attending College**

The employment experience as a resource for college success has an impact. The FWS program is interrelated subsystems, which can also be identified as a financial aid

program within financial aid. Administrators and students are the key elements in running a FWS program. The FWS program should be a program separate from Financial Aid in the way it is presented to students, as students are not aware of the importance and benefits the program provided to participating students. College access indicates student accessibility to financial aid with combined support promotes student persistency. This can help the students develop skills and learn the important value of future employment (Scott-Clayton, 2011). The purpose of the FWS program is to provide financial assistance for educational costs. If educational costs are not covered with an institution, then the institution will face students dropping out. The students are dependent upon the financial aid program to assist them with their educational expenses. “As money and resources become more scarce for college students, jobs become more of a necessity rather than an after-school activity” (Wantanabe, 2010, p. 40).

FWS may appear very important for individual students, but it serves a remarkably small portion of students and accounts for a tiny fraction of employment that helps students pay for their college education (Baum, 2010). Students also learn to manage their time when it comes to school, work, and personal responsibilities. Effective time management strategies can be provided to students when they obtain a FWS job. For some students, their FWS job is their first experience of learning how to manage school and work. As more students are employed, they face having to balance their academic requirements, extracurricular activities, and employment responsibilities to maintain their lifestyles (Furr & Elling, 2000). Not all the research shows negative GPA

effects from the amount of hours a student is employed. Some findings indicated that employment had either a positive effect or none at all (Wantanabe, 2005). A number of researchers, for example, found that hard work built stronger academic character because it taught the students time-management skills, gave them experience outside the classroom, and provided them with more satisfaction in college (Pennington et al., 1989). Giving the students the opportunity for meaningful one-on-one interactions with their professors is also critical to fostering a supportive campus culture, and such interactions may be particularly beneficial to adult working students' sense of belonging as well as validate their presence on campus, thus encouraging their academic success (Perna, 2010).

The relationship between work and grades is mediated by intervening college experience (Pike et al., 2008). It has been concluded the relationship between working for pay and student success is nonlinear. It was also noted that part-time, on-campus employment is associated with the highest level of academic achievement and degree attainment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Researchers reported that students who worked 20 or fewer hours on campus had higher grades than students who did not work, worked more than 20 hours per week, or worked off campus (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). Kuh et al. (2008) found that time spent studying, participating in active collaborative learning experiences, and interacting with faculty members was significantly related to college grades, even after controlling for a variety of student background characteristics. Researchers proposed two questions in the "First-Year



Students' Employment, Engagement, and Academic Achievement: Untangling the Relationship Between Work and Grades" to get an understanding of working for pay and grades in college: Does the direct relationship between work and grades depend on whether students work more or less than 20 hours per week and or whether they work on or off campus? and Is the relationship between work and grades mediated by student engagement in educationally purposeful activities? (Pike et al., 2008). In "Educational Expenditures and Student Engagement: When Does Money Matter?" (Pike et al., 2006) the research method applied was "the conceptual model," as the levels of student engagement are all related to learning outcomes, in turn, and directly related to students' background characteristics and work experience. "The students' background characteristics are also related to their work experience, and both background characteristics and work experience are indirectly related to college grades through students' levels of engagement" (Pike, Kuh, & Massa-McKinley, 2008, p. 564). The discussion of balancing work, academics, and the college experience of working during college is the norm for students from low- and middle-income families (Hornak et al., 2010). For 74% of the students in the study, the families expected them to have a job while attending college (Hornak et al., 2010). Students had a difficult time finding an on-campus job, while 30% of students received FWS aid, and many did not know about FWS.

### **Experiences that Enrich One's Life and Learning**

According to Muldoon (2009):

It looked at the range of paid and voluntary work undertaken by students during their studies, what they gain from in terms of graduate attributes and the impact of institutional recognition of it. It seems that part-time work is a useful avenue for the development of graduate attributes and other desirable personal qualities, and enhances students' employability. Additionally, students appear to benefit from institutional recognition of extracurricular achievement while at university. (p. 237)

Muldoon's study was set to determine if students did develop desirable skills and attributes while participating in part-time work and if institutional recognition of such student development was valued by the student themselves and by the employers.

It is understood that money is a motivator for having part-time students' responses in the Muldoon study. The other factor students mentioned was the value of working. There was also an opportunity to develop work skills such as "customer service skills, teamwork skills, and skill in people management and communication" (Muldoon, 2009, p. 244). Students who seek work have their focus on "employability after graduation when experience and the development of work related skills are the prime motivators for paid work, apart from income, and also for voluntary work" (Muldoon, 2009, p. 242). The interest of students is personal development through the development of "life skills,

interpersonal skills and doing good deeds for the good of others” (Muldoon, 2009, p. 242).

Students were also asked what they thought they learned from their experience of part-time work. Employers were asked what they thought students learned through working part-time. The most frequently cited work skill was customer service/relations skills, which could also be categorized as people skills, thus underlining the overall importance attached by employers to communicate skills. The next most frequently cited work skill was ability to work in a team and understanding roles and responsibilities in a team environment. Organizational skills, time management, punctuality, the need for accuracy and attention to detail and “learning to think on feet” were also listed by employers as imported lessons learned from work experience (Muldoon, 2009, p. 242). The most common was personal attributes such as responsibility, commitment, reliability, discipline, motivation, and life skills.

Hornak et al. (2010) provided an opportunity for students to share their experience of working while attending college and decision making. Students believed a secure financial future is created by earning a college degree. Hornak et al. also captured the students’ experience as a purpose of their financing choice and revealed three themes: (a) the practical challenges to initially secure the chosen method(s) of financing (i.e., obtaining financial aid, securing one or more jobs), (b) the impact of such choices on academics (limited options, performances, etc.), and (c) the impact of such choices on

college engagement and involvement. It is important students create balance in their work schedule and academics.

The issue of balancing responsibilities was a major issue for our students.

Participants told us they were attending college to create a better economic future for themselves. Many were balancing the demands of a full load of academic classes, work schedules that most often exceed 20 hours per week, studying, and trying to maintain a social life . . . The issue of balance can be addressed through academic and student affairs programming and a creative approach to engage students on campus community, but are limited by the way campus activities are scheduled. As campuses design their student life programming and yearlong activities, the consideration of varying time demands on students could benefit the vast majority of working students. (Hornak et al., 2010, p. 494)

### **Rationale of the Study**

The student development theory addresses how student involvement directly impacts the motivation of students to remain in school, to apply for graduate schools, and to excel academically (Astin, 1999). It can also be used by researchers and administrators as a guide for understanding student development and also. “Student involvement refers to the quantity and quality of a the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience . . . According to the theory, the greater the

student's involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development" (Astin, 1999, pp. 528-529).

The FWS program offers students applied work experience as well as financial aid, and the prospective benefits resultant from their experience should not go unnoticed. At a minimum, students learn general job-related skills. Under the best environments, work-study jobs can provide students with a chance to explore career opportunities and to gain a better understanding of how knowledge gained in school is applied to a job after graduation. Students understand the importance of education and the financial support provided by the institutions. Students who are actively involved in their education will enjoy greater success academically and developmentally while deriving greater satisfaction with their institutions and experience. The time and effort students utilize are the greatest resources in the development of their educational experience. The work experience may even lead to an offer of a permanent position.

### **Summary**

The research has important implications for student affairs professionals and others interested in the success of FWS students. Helping FWS students become engaged in activities that encourage active and collaborative learning and foster positive interactions among students, employers, and faculty members can be very beneficial to students' academic experiences. Campus leaders should also consider intentionally

designing active collaboration learning experiences for FWS students that also appear to be linked with more frequent student-employer interaction.

The literature points out two important concepts: the benefit from working and attending college and challenges associated with working while attending college. Students will also learn how to manage their time when it comes to school, work, and personal responsibilities. A student can be provided with effective time management strategies when obtaining FWS jobs. For some students, their FWS jobs are their first experience learning how to manage school and work. As more students are employed, they face having to balance their academic requirements, extracurricular activities, and employment responsibilities to maintain their lifestyles. This research adds insight to the discussion of FWS students and their learned experiences.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

This quantitative research study aimed to understand the impact of students participating in Federal Work-Study and what they identified as having learned from the program, specifically at a public four-year university in California. FWS employers play a vital role in the success of their student, but this role becomes increasingly more critical when dealing with student academic achievements and career developments. By understanding the role of FWS jobs and the impact they have on students, it was the hope of the researcher to provide this information to educators who work directly with students in providing the essential tools utilized in the workforce. The researcher also sought to identify if employers provided a supportive atmosphere of learning and personal development in FWS program participation. What was limited, however, were the specific data on FWS and the benefits to students besides financial aid. The researcher also sought to identify ways in which students can provide essential experience to other students participating in a FWS program.

An analysis of the data collected from 39 FWS students enrolled and employed at a public 4-year university is presented in this the quantitative study. This chapter discusses the population and sample of the study, the design of the study, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures.

## **Research Design**

This quantitative research study aimed to understand what benefits, in addition to monetary, students received by participating in a FWS program, specifically employed at a public 4-year university in California. Survey respondents were asked to answer the questions independently (to prevent bias and inaccuracies) and voluntarily and were also asked to answer as honestly and accurately as possible. Respondents were asked to identify their reason for employment, skills learned, the impact of the FWS experience and employer on academic achievement and employment as well as advice they would give to future FWS participants.

### **Setting of the Study**

The setting of this study was a public 4-year institution in one of the largest urban and most diverse cities in the state. The Capay University (CU) has a student population of approximately 28,000 undergraduate and graduate students who are involved in one of more than 100 fields of studies that include the areas of biological sciences, arts and humanities, and engineering. Located in Northern California, CU is one of 23 campuses and one of the largest campuses within the Capay University system. The ethnic breakdown of CU undergraduate students is as follows: 40% White/Caucasian, 20% Asian, 18% Hispanic, 6% African-American, and 1% American Indian (Capay University, 2011).

The FWS hiring process at the institution includes the program to be cooperative. FWS is a collaborative program between federal funds and departmental funds. FWS



funds pay 70% of the students' earning and the departments pay the remaining 30%. The standard FWS award is \$3,000 per academic year; however, students can be awarded less. A student's salary (hourly rate) should reflect the job duties and assignments. Students who have been awarded FWS have access to the FWS Job Board. Two forms are required to hire a FWS student: FWS Employment Referral Form and Student Employee Payroll Transaction Form. Students must complete the two identified forms and must get their GPA verified in addition to completing the hiring process with Payroll Services. Students must be in "Good Academic Standing," enrolled at least half-time and maintain the minimum GPA.

### **Population and Sample**

The population for this study was FWS students attending Capay University. The sample for this study comprises FWS enrolled students who had a FWS job at the time of the study. The sample was selected and identified by the Capay University Financial Aid Systems administrator using a query that identified the students participating in the FWS program. The sample was purposeful and fairly representative of FWS students in California attending a public 4-year university. Students enrolled who paid with FWS funds were ultimately emailed. The quantitative data were collected from an electronic survey distributed via their student portal email account. The respondents to the survey resulted in a relatively small sample size, and it is not intended that this is representative of all FWS college students.

### **Design of the Study**

The quantitative study aimed to highlight factors related to FWS students' personal perception of provided opportunities, learned skills, experience, and recommendations related to FWS. The study sought to understand to what degree certain variables impacted students' learned skills through FWS employment. It was completed voluntarily and anonymously by FWS students at Capay University (CU) during the 2011/2012 academic school year. The sample was purposeful and fairly representative of FWS students in California attending a public 4-year university. However, this design may not be entirely representative of the complete population of FWS students. The selected students had participated in a FWS program. All the survey questions were closed-ended and multiple-choice. Five initial questions were posed to gain demographic information: age range, sex, ethnicity, current grade level, and grade level at the start of FWS employment.

### **Data Collection**

In accordance with the California State University, Sacramento's Institutional Review process, the researcher completed the Human Subject Protocol Application to initiate the research process and obtained written approval by the Student Affairs Division prior to submission. It was then approved by the Humans Subjects Chairperson in order to begin the study. Once approved, the researcher contacted the Director of Financial Aid for assistance in locating students who met the requirements of this study. An email (see Appendix A) was sent to the students by CU's Financial Aid department.

The email contained an introduction to the researcher, an explanation of the purpose of the survey, and the contributions of the survey towards the researcher's study. It also contained an explanation of voluntary consent, a statement to assure anonymity of all voluntary participants, and contact information for the researcher. The email concluded with a link to access the survey on SurveyMonkey.

Thirty-five FWS students completed the survey after one week. Seeking additional participants, the researcher re-sent the e-mail invitation to all 2011/2012 enrolled FWS students (see Appendix A). From the subsequent email invitation, the researcher received four additional completed surveys. One final email invitation was sent one week before the close of the survey on May 22, 2012. No additional responses were received.

**Instrumentation.** In the spring of 2012, surveys were sent electronically to 270 participating FWS students. The survey was administered solely online, via the Internet. Students were asked to complete the survey on SurveyMonkey at [www.surveymonkey.com/s/FWSExperience](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FWSExperience), with the link and the consent form inserted in the body of the email (see Appendix B). Participants received no reward or compensation for participation in the research. The research design stated that the research would be used for scholarly purposes and to assist the university in improving services for students in the FWS program. The questions were designed to help the researcher uncover a better understanding of additional benefits of participating in the FWS program. This research study will help answer some of the questions associated

with what is learned by participating in a FWS program. There were 13 questions on the survey, taking no more than 10 minutes to complete. The research design allowed for no personal interaction with the students. If students needed help or had questions regarding the survey or research in general, contact information for further support was provided by the researcher. Aside from this, the survey was designed to be user friendly while utilizing language both relevant to the field and comprehensible by FWS participants. The survey questions were tested on two previous FWS participants, one male and one female.

The survey questions were focused on the following key areas:

1. Learned skills during FWS experience
2. The impact of FWS employment on academic achievement
3. The impact of FWS employment on career development
4. Learning and personal development provided by FWS employer
5. Changes and recommendations to future FWS participants

Questions 6 and 7 of the survey were designed to identify learned skills and networking opportunities. Students were asked to rate the skills learned during their FWS experience. Questions 8 and 9 were specifically geared towards students and the identification of how their FWS employer impacted their academic achievement and career development. Questions 10 and 11 asked participants if their employer provided a supportive atmosphere for learned and personal development and overall experience. Questions 12 and 13 asked survey respondents to self-reflect on if they would have done

anything else to maximize their FWS experience and what recommendations would they give to future FWS participants.

After two weeks, 39 students completed the survey, representing a 14% response rate for this sample. To review, the research questions were aimed to evaluate:

1. What do students receiving FWS identify as relevant learning acquired from their participation in a FWS program?
2. What benefit do affected students recognize from their participation in a FWS program?
3. What are some of the ways in which the FWS experience might be structured to maximize the academic/life experience benefit to participating students?

Research has shown that in addition to people skills, there is a diverse array of lessons students learn through part-time work, as stated by employers. The skills learned through part-time work have been established as: communication, leadership, time management, customer service, professional office etiquette, and interview and resume writing. Students often described the stated skills as positive outcomes while working in the university setting.

Research supported the notion that students working on campus or off campus keeps them engaged; and there is a debate on positive and negative aspects of working related to students' overall satisfaction with college. Although colleges may provide a purposeful and conducive environment for students, they are finding themselves working

due to the limited financial resources provided. The norm to offset the rising college cost is students participate in work-study, work off campus, or are employed in both.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The survey questions were developed to understand the reason of student participation in a FWS program and the skills they learned. The key areas of inquiry were aimed at skills learned, impact of employment on academic achievement, career development, personal development, and the recommended changes to future FWS participants.

The data for this study were collected through the data collection system of SurveyMonkey. This data collection system allowed the researcher to ask the questions of the students, collect the responses, as well as analyze the data collected. SurveyMonkey collected, recorded, and summarized the results online, which facilitated the tracking of respondents and the viewing of results during the survey period. Once the respondents answered the questions, the results were saved in the researcher's account on the SurveyMonkey home page. At the end of the response period, the researcher was able to collect the survey results with responses for each individual respondent and a compilation of percentages of respondents answering each question for each of the different possible Likert-type scale scores. The results, through charts and graphs, are highlighted in Chapter 4 in order to present the final results of the study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research study focused on students participating in a FWS program at Capay University. For the sample, students who participated in the FWS program were the primary target since many students overlook the benefits of FWS jobs. Because of the specific nature of this audience and survey, the results of the study may not be generalized to all current and future students participating in a FWS program at other universities. The sample size in this study is a methodological limitation. It is ideal for this qualitative research to have a small sample size because one occurrence of a piece of data, or a code, is all that is necessary to ensure that it becomes part of the analysis framework. Sample sizes that are large will not allow for the identification of a qualitative analysis. The sample size used in this research is relatively small as compared to the population of students participating in a FWS program. This study relied on the self-reported data and can contain bias due to the remembering and not remembering experiences or events that occurred at the past. One's experience or act of a positive event can be unclear or showy and turn out to be either a negative or positive experience. As a new Student Affairs professional, the researcher is becoming more aware of the effectiveness of students participating in a FWS program. This researcher believes the FWS program benefits students besides providing for students financially. This experience has prompted the timely investigation of what factors contributed to the students' learned skills while participating in a FWS.

## Chapter 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to identify what, if any, impacts participating in FWS had on students and what was identified as learned by students, specifically at a public 4-year university in California. By understanding the role of FWS jobs and the impact they have on students, it is the hope of the researcher to provide this information to educators who work directly with students in providing the essential tools utilized in the workforce. The researcher also sought to identify if employers provided a supportive atmosphere of learning and personal development, as identified from the student surveys.

The research was focused on the following key areas:

1. Learned skills during FWS experience
2. The impact of FWS employment on academic achievement
3. The impact of FWS employment on career development
4. Learning and personal development provided by FWS employer
5. Changes and recommendations to future FWS participants

Questions 6 and 7 of the survey were designed to identify learned skills and networking opportunities. Students were asked to rate the skills learned during their FWS experience. Questions 8 and 9 were specifically geared towards students and the identification of how their FWS employer impacted their academic achievement and



career development. Questions 10 and 11 asked participants if their employer provided them a supportive atmosphere for learned and personal development and overall experience. Questions 12 and 13 asked survey respondents to self-reflect on if they would have done anything else to maximize their FWS experience and what recommendations would they give to future FWS participants. The last question of the survey, questions 15, was asked to provide information to future FWS participants.

These key areas aimed to provide clarity and insight into the phenomenon of the lack of information on a student FWS experience; these key areas sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What do students receiving FWS identify as relevant learning acquired from their participation in a FWS program?
2. What benefit do affected students recognize from their participation in a FWS program?
3. What are some of the ways in which the FWS experience might be structured to maximize the academic/life experience benefit to participating students?

This chapter presents the results from the online survey categorized by key area and followed by a review of the findings. The aforementioned key areas guided the survey and are used to highlight certain components of the research questions. The results begin with a summary of the student participant demographics, particularly the nature of the program that gave them access to the survey. The evaluation is presented in order of the above key areas mentioned. This chapter ends with a discussion of the data.

The sample for this study was taken from the population of approximately 24,000 undergraduate students enrolled at Capay University (CU) during the 2011/2012 academic school year. The participants in this study were undergraduates and graduates. The survey for this study was provided to students enrolled in Capay University, a 4-year university. The sample size was 270 undergraduate and graduate students, which consisted of both males and females over 18 years old. A large majority of the respondents identified their ethnic group. The sampling was not a true random sample, as the students who participated did so voluntarily by completing the electronic survey and submitting it online. The survey yielded 39 respondents.

## **Survey Results**

### **Respondent Demographics**

Questions (a) and (b) were the only demographic questions asked on the survey. Students were prompted to indicate age, sex, and ethnicity. In response to questioning ethnicity, 33.3% of students replied “Asian American,” 28.2% said “Latino,” 17.9% said “White,” 5.1% said “African American,” 2.6% said “Biracial,” 2.6% said “Pacific Islander,” and 10.3% stated, “Prefer not to answer.”

### **The Learned Skills During FWS Experience**

There is much previously conducted research around the notion that students learn from work experience. At times, students are not aware of the types of skills learned from participating in the FWS program, since many were freshmen when they started a

FWS job. Often, the preparation is left to the student not knowing what is to be learned in the university setting. When surveying, respondents in this study identified the positive outcomes of working in a university setting and replied, “strongly agree,” “agree,” “neutral,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree” to the following: Professional Etiquette in an office environment, Leadership, Time Management, Communication, Customer Service, and Interview and Resume Writing. In response to this question, 46.1% said “strongly agree” and 7.69% said “strongly disagree” that the FWS experience helped develop the professional etiquette being in an office environment, 51.2% said “strongly agree” and 5.12% said “strongly disagree” that the FWS experience helped develop communication skills, and 43.5% said “strongly agree” and 7.69% said “strongly disagree” to customer service skills developed. The respondents also identified leadership and management as a developed skill: 35.8% said “strongly agree” and 5.12% said “strongly disagree.” Regarding interview and resume writing, 41.2% said “neutral” and 15.3% said “strongly disagree” to the developed skill learned during their FWS experience.

### **The Impact of FWS Employment on Academic Achievement**

The survey respondents were all FWS recipients at CU. The FWS program provides monetary funds to students as part of their financial aid award. Of the 39 students who took the survey, the students perceived the FWS experience had an impact on their academic achievement at the following levels: 41.0% said “very positive,” 33.3% said “positive,” 23.0% said “neutral,” and 2.56% said “negative.”

### **The Impact of FWS Employment on Career Development**

Students are faced with an unprecedented number of factors influencing their decisions on what type of career they would like to pursue. FWS provides students with the opportunity to develop skills to prepare for the workforce. Of the students who were involved in the FWS program and responded to the survey, 38.4% said FWS had a “positive” impact on their career development. Thirty-five and one-half percent indicated they had a “very positive” impact. Twenty-three percent said “neutral” and 2.56% said it had a “negative” impact on their career development.

### **Learning and Personal Development Provided by FWS Employer**

Students were asked how their FWS employer(s) provided a supportive atmosphere for learning and personal development. Almost two thirds (64.1%) of the students said FWS “always” provided a supportive atmosphere, 15.8% said “usually,” 10.2% said “sometimes,” 5.12% said “occasionally,” and 5.12% said “never” provided a supportive atmosphere for learning and personal development.

### **Changes and Recommendations to Future FWS Participants**

Students in the survey were asked what types of things they might have done differently to maximize their FWS experience and the respondents’ recommendations are as follows:

- Did more on-the-job training and had more help on interview building skills.
- I think I maximized my full opportunity.
- I would have worked less to manage my course work.

- More hours to work
- I wish I could have worked more in my own department as opposed to other departments. This would have allowed me to network more in my own department/field and know more about how my department operates our speech, language, and hearing clinic.
- Extend the amount of money we received so our time working can be extended
- I would have worked less hours so I could focus more on my school work.
- I wouldn't change anything except maybe for the assignments that are given to me as a Student Assistant. I would like to have my supervisor give me more challenging tasks.
- Work more hours
- I still work at the same FWS job, so I think I'm still learning more and more every day.
- Spent more hours on the job to learn more about the position
- My only critique is that I wasn't able to work during breaks and this could have helped me financially during those breaks.
- Took more units to gain more well rounded knowledge
- I would have tried to look for a different FWS opportunity but this was hiring and I needed a job. I would also like to try to engage with the community more, but it all depends on how the community responds.

- I will never use FWS again, because you can't work more than one job even though you're not getting a full 20 hours a week.
- Allow FWS students to work more than 20 hours a week.
- I finally utilized my time and skills learned through FWS.
- None. I have had a great experience.
- Working for a different department this past year and not staying with the same one for more than one year because I would have learned more.
- If I want to be more intellectually challenged I could have opted for a different position, but I chose one that would be low stress.
- Nothing, it was quite good.
- Nothing

Students were also asked what advice they would give to future FWS participants to get the most from their FWS experience:

- Try to get the most of your FWS by being involved and always asking questions.
- Give it your all because in the end you will make great connections and friends
- FWS IS THE BEST THING TO DO!!
- Hopefully to work more hours, continue positive relationships with the department and get to know other departments around your job
- If you want to work in your department to learn more about it and make connections, make that clear from the beginning.
- Pick a site of your interest

- Encourage them to apply fast because all positions are given to returning students and try to find something that aligns with their career.
- Do not overload yourself, you have all of your life to work but you won't always have the opportunity to get an education, so do what you can do to do good in school and incorporate everything in you learn from work into your life.
- Make sure you network with all the faculty members you meet and take directions from your supervisor. The people you meet and things you learn from working as a FWS student all will help you go far in life.
- “advice” I would tell them that FWS is great because you already have the grants, you just have work for it.
- Always be willing to learn new things and never be afraid to ask questions or let your employer know that you are interested in doing certain tasks if you feel it will help you in your future career.
- Be open minded, and just be open to new experiences and all the information that are at the palm of our hands. Use the resources that are available.
- FULLY INDULGE IN THE EXPERIENCE THAT COMES YOUR WAY AND MAKE THE MOST OF THEM, IT WILL BENEFIT YOU NO MATTER WHAT IN THE END.
- Find a job that meets the criteria for what you are majoring in.
- Don't do it. But if you do, make sure they take out taxes, etc. on each paycheck. I didn't because I thought it was exempt and ended up owing quite a bit to the IRS.

- Increase the hour cap; some students are able to work more than 20 hours and still be successful in school.
- Get a job that interests you and is related to your degree for future career.
- Use extra time at work to study. Don't be afraid to converse with people, you might meet a lot of people through your job. It can make your school experience better over all.
- FWS is great. It has given me the opportunity to improve my customer service and leadership qualities, as well as overall a great learning experience. It has given me skills I will need for my future career goals.
- It's a learning process for everybody.
- Apply for positions as soon as you can.
- Work hard, study and always think about your future.
- To get the most out of the position they are and always have a positive attitude and work hard and well.

Most, if not all, of the responses are mainly positive. Except for the responses to previous questions regarding satisfaction with the FWS program and type of employment offered. Seventeen of the students decided to skip this question.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

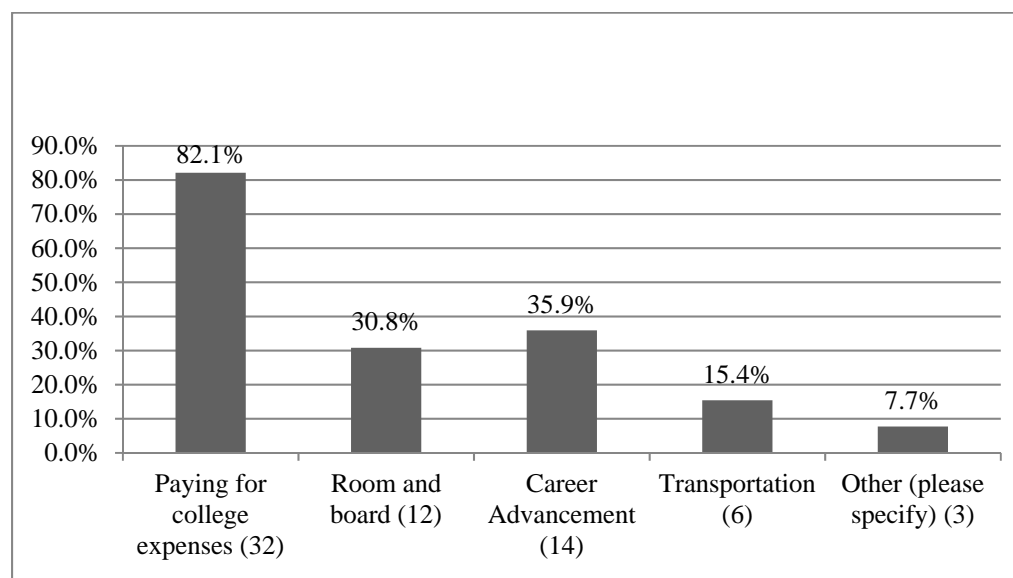
This study was formulated with the intention of gaining an understanding of what, if any, impacts participating in FWS had on students and what they identified as having



learned, specifically at a public 4-year university in California. By understanding the role of FWS jobs and the impact they have on students, it is the hope of the researcher to provide this information to educators who work directly with students in providing the essential tools utilized in the workforce. The researcher also sought to identify if employers in the FWS program provided a supportive atmosphere of learning and personal development, as identified from the student surveys. Respondents were asked what their reason for working a FWS job was and if FWS was their first paid employment. The results are shown in Figures 1 and 2, correspondingly.

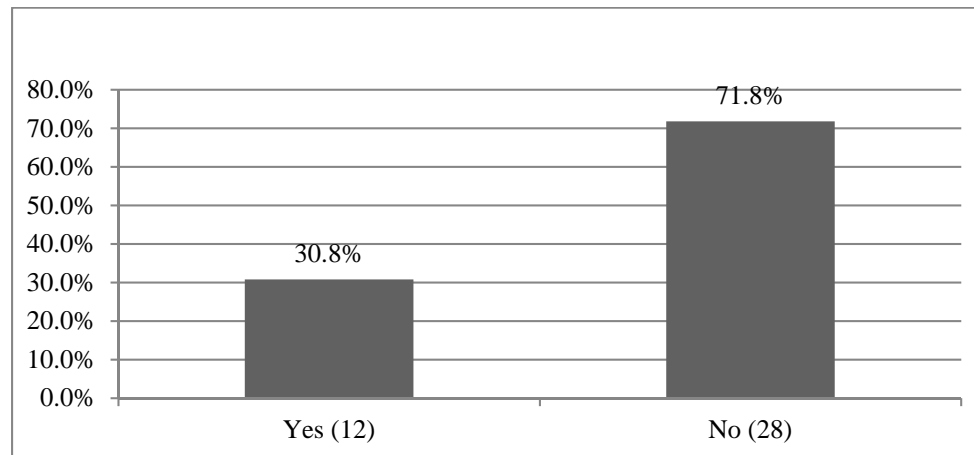
The majority (82.1%) of students identified the reason for working a FWS job was to pay for college expenses, which would be ideal for any student working during their educational experience. More than one third (35.9%) of the respondents also sought FWS to provide a networking opportunity for future career advancement, and nearly 30.8% reported the reason for working was to assist in paying for room and board. The additional responses from the respondents included “needed extra cash for miscellaneous expenses,” “I needed a job and the work experience,” “food” (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Reason for Working a Federal Work-Study Job



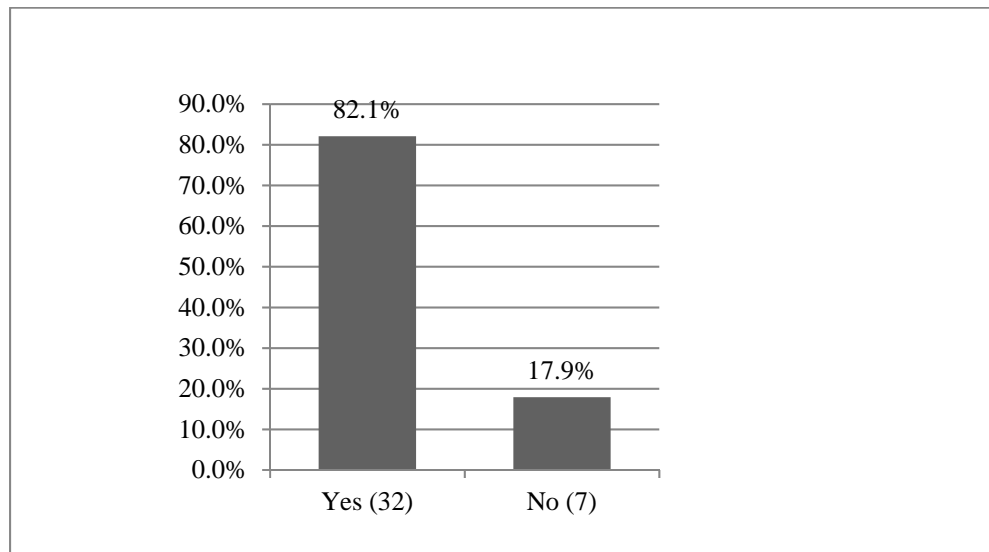
Almost three quarters (71.8%) of the respondents identified FWS as their first paid employment. It has been shown that earning money for any type of college experience is the primary reason for working a FWS (see Figure 2). Many of the FWS students had previous work experience, depending on the age of the student and the grade level as they entered college, and the researcher could argue the downturn in the economy had much to do with the changing faces of the student population. Many offices require students to come in with a certain amount of experience and knowledge and only 71.8% of the students come to university having had previous jobs.

Figure 2 FWS First Paid Employment



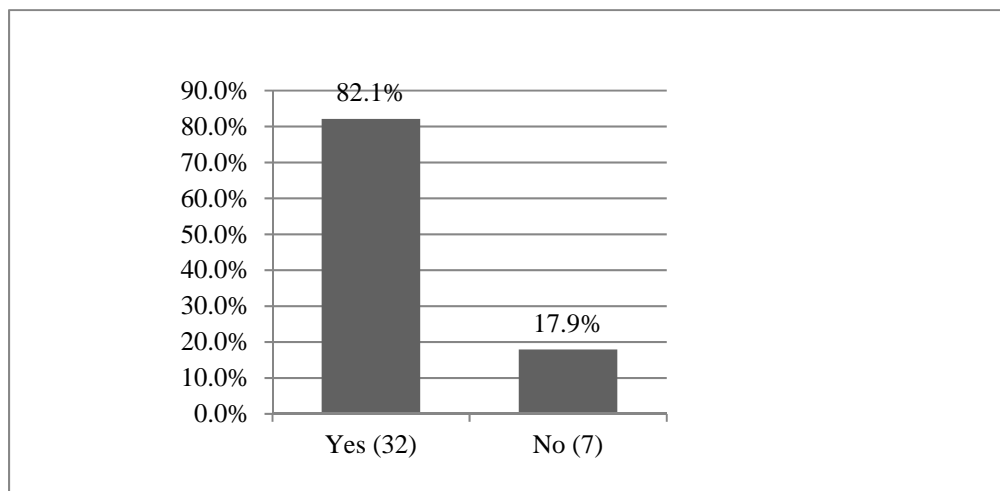
There has been research on the causative effects of FWS participation. Many of the positions offered by the FWS program at CU are clerical, many are within offices at the university, and this gives the students the opportunity to get a glimpse of how the internal process of the university works. A majority (82.1%) of students responded that FWS provided opportunities to better understand the university they attend; only 17.9% indicated that FWS did not provide opportunities to understand the university and this could also have been students who worked at an off-campus location (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 FWS Provided Opportunities to Better Understand University



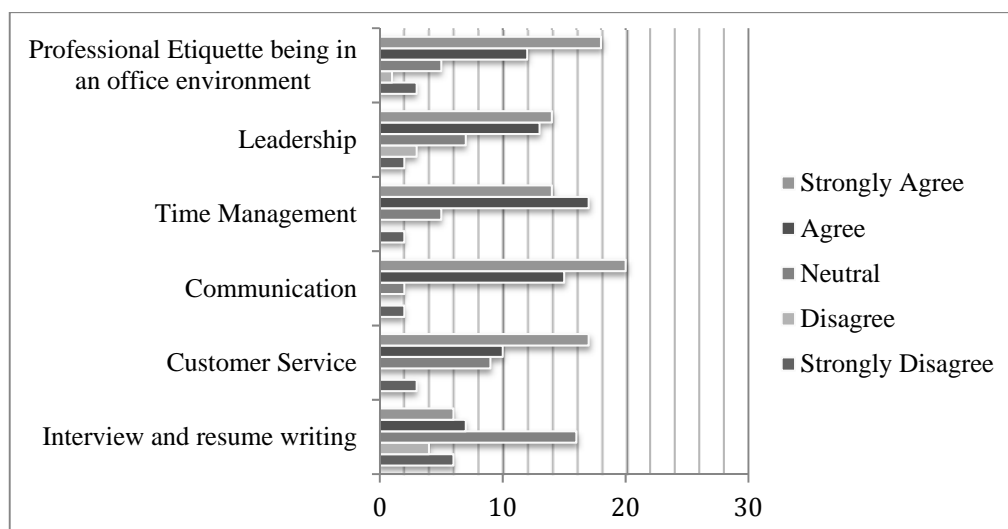
Students in the FWS positions in some cases continue working for the university as permanent employees and of those having had engaged in the FWS college experience, 82.1% of students identified a FWS job provided them with opportunities to develop networks related to their academic or career goals (see Figure 4)

Figure 4 FWS Job Provided Opportunity to Develop Network



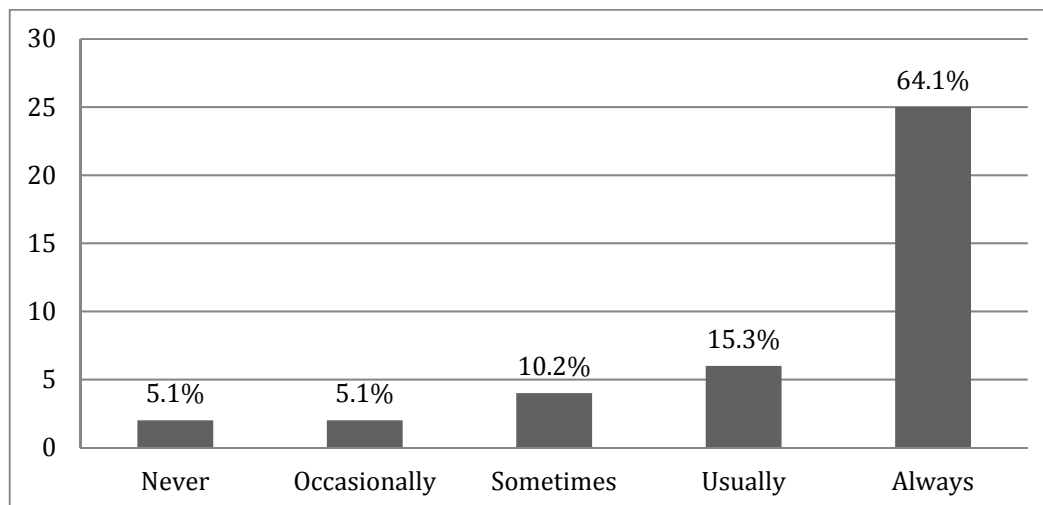
Many of the FWS students worked in an office environment so many of them had strong office-type skills. The respondents “*strongly agreed*,” being in an office environment helped develop communication, professional etiquette, customer service, and time management (see Figure 5). If many of the students pursue an office position after graduation then the types of jobs help their skills and give them an advantage in seeking employment.

Figure 5 FWS Experience Has Helped Develop Skills



Of the survey respondents who reported a supportive atmosphere for learning and personal development, 64.1% indicated FWS employers “always” did. The campus provides a variety of jobs to all its students, and 15.3% indicated that the FWS employers “usually” provided a supporting atmosphere (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 FWS Provided a Supportive Atmosphere for Learning and Development



### Summary of Findings

There are numerous reasons why students participate in the FWS program. For many, the experience has been positively related to their academic and career goals and opportunities to develop networks. The data from the students who participated in the FWS program indicated the extent to which their FWS experience helped them develop skills. The FWS employers also had an impact on their career development. Respondents were able to provide advice to future FWS students.

## Chapter 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Summary**

Chapter 4 presented the findings of the study, what, if any, impacts participating in FWS had on students and what they identified as having learned, specifically at a public 4-year university in California. The findings of the study were analyzed from the survey results of 32 FWS students enrolled at CU. As more students are seeking employment due to meeting the demands of obtaining a higher education, it is understood employers are dependent upon FWS students. Employers that participate in a FWS program provide students with a supportive environment of learning. Students also develop personal skills through their participation in the FWS program, as identified in the responses to the student survey.

This study was designed to provide insight into FWS involvement and its impact on students participating in a FWS program. There are many challenges students face when obtaining FWS employment. The five key areas explored in this study were:

1. Learned skills during FWS experience
2. The impact of FWS employment on academic achievement
3. The impact of FWS employment on career development
4. Learning and personal development provided by FWS employer
5. Changes and recommendations for future FWS participants

Understanding these aspects helped guide the structure of the research. Each component has a unique and distinct impact on how these students made the successful transition and how they viewed themselves in relation to being able to attend school and work a FWS job. Students were asked to self-analyze their FWS experience while attending college. In addition to these areas, this study was guided by the following research questions to gain deeper understanding:

1. What do students receiving FWS identify as relevant learning acquired from their participation in a FWS program?
2. What benefit do affected students recognize from their participation in a FWS program?
3. What are some of the ways in which the FWS experience might be structured to maximize the academic/life experience benefit to participating students?

It is important to give praise to the families who are hard working to help their student pay for their student's education. The issues students have come across are their parents' income is too high to qualify for need-based grant programs. All students are given the opportunity to fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and some students think their parents make too much money to qualify for federal student aid and do not fill out the FAFSA. By default, the best option is for a student to complete the FAFSA and let the Department of Education determine the families' financial aid eligibility. Upon the successful completion of the FAFSA, families are provided with an Expected Family Contribution (EFC).



By surveying FWS students who are currently enrolled at a public 4-year university, the researcher aimed to identify if certain aspects of campus employment involvement impacted their perceptions of their own ability and to identify what was important in participating in a FWS program. An analysis of the data collected by the researcher from the survey participants for this study is presented in this chapter.

All data collection for this study was conducted through surveys given to students participating in the FWS student program at CU in the 2012 spring semester. The target audience consisted of 270 enrolled first-year students of which the researcher was able to accurately gather responses from 39 students. Participants were invited to voluntarily respond to a survey administered through Survey Monkey. All participants were given 30 days to access the online survey after which the web-based survey was set to automatically close. Two reminder emails were sent to the sample group to garner additional responses, yet the number of replies remained virtually unchanged.

### **Conclusions**

There are numerous reasons as to why students participate in the FWS program. For many, the experience has been positively related to their academic and career goals and opportunities to develop networks. The data from the students who participated in the FWS program indicated the extent to which their FWS experience helped them develop skills. The FWS employers also had an impact on their career development. Respondents were able to provide advice to future FWS students.

At times, students are not aware of the types of learned skills from participating in a FWS program, since many were freshmen when they started a FWS job. Often, students are left to learn about the unknown resources provided in college. As a student engages in the college environment, he or she will begin to learn of the services provided and make their college experience positive. When surveyed, respondents in this study identified the positive outcomes of working in a university setting as: Professional etiquette being in an office environment, Leadership, Time Management, Communication, Customer Service, and Interview and Resume Writing. In response to this question, 46.1% said “strongly agree” and 7.69% said “strongly disagree” that the FWS experience helped develop the professional etiquette of being in an office environment, 51.2% said “strongly agree” and 5.12% said “strongly disagree” that the FWS experience helped them develop communication skills, 43.5% said “strongly agree” and 7.69% said “strongly disagree” to customer service skills developed. The respondents also identified leadership and management as a developed skill; 35.8% said “strongly agree” and 5.12% said “strongly disagree.” Regarding interview and resume writing, 41.2% said “neutral” and 15.3% said “strongly disagree” to the developed skill learned during their FWS experience. The survey respondents were all FWS recipients at CU. The FWA program provides monetary funds to students as part of their financial aid award. Of the 39 students who took the survey, those who perceived the FWS experience had an impact on their academic achievement responded with the following: 41.0% said “very positive,” 33.3% said “positive,” 23.0% said “neutral,” and 2.56% said “negative.”

The survey respondents also provided substantial feedback to the future FWS students participating in a FWS program.

### **Recommendations**

These findings have important implications for student affairs professionals and others interested in the success of FWS students. Helping FWS students become engaged in activities that encourage active and collaborative learning and foster positive interaction among students, employers, and faculty members can be very beneficial to students' academic experiences. Campus leaders should also consider intentionally designing active collaboration learning experiences for FWS students that also appear to be linked with more frequent student-employer interaction.

The literature points out two important concepts: the benefit from working and attending college and challenges associated with working while attending college. Students will also learn how to manage their time when it comes to school, work, and personal responsibilities. A student can learn effective time management strategies while at a FWS job. For some students, their FWS job is their first experience learning how to manage school and work. As students are employed, they face having to balance their academic requirements, extracurricular activities, and employment responsibilities to maintain their lifestyles (Scott-Clayton, 2011). This research will add insight to the discussion of FWS students and their learned experiences. Further research in this study includes focus groups or interviews to get more in-depth information regarding their

FWS experience and the impact on their academics. The opportunity to engage with the students and employers on a more personable level may produce more robust data.

APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Invitation to Participate in the Study

The purpose of this research is to provide students and university administrators with information on maximizing a Federal Work-Study (FWS) student's experience. This is a research project being conducted by Teresa Lerma at California State University-Sacramento. You are invited to participate in this research because you have participated in the Federal Work-Study program during your educational career.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time prior to when you submit your completed survey. In addition, you may choose not to answer a particular question without invalidating the rest of your survey responses. If you decide not to participate in this study, you will not be penalized.

Your requested participation in this research involves an online survey about the Federal Work-Study experience that will take approximately 10-20 minutes. Your responses will be confidential and anonymous. There is no risk to you in participating in this survey since no identifying information will be collected such as name, email address or IP address.

Your completion of the survey indicates that you have read this introduction and that you consent to have your survey responses included in this research. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes and to assist the university in improving services for students in the FWS program. The actual surveys and responses will be destroyed when the research is completed.

If you have any questions about the survey or the study, please feel free to contact the researcher, [REDACTED]

## APPENDIX B

## Survey Questions

## Evaluating your Federal Work-Study experience

- a. What is your date of birth? \_\_\_\_\_ \_
  - b. What is your sex: Male, Female, Prefer not to answer
  - c. What is your race/ethnicity: African American, Latino, Asian American, Non-Hispanic White, Biracial, Native American/Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, Prefer not to answer
1. What is your current grade level?
    - a. Freshmen
    - b. Sophomore
    - c. Junior
    - d. Senior
  2. What was your grade level when you started your first FWS job?
    - a. Freshmen
    - b. Sophomore
    - c. Junior
    - d. Senior
  3. What were your reasons for obtaining a FWS job? (check all that apply)
    - a. Paying for college expenses
    - b. Room and board

- c. Career Advancement
  - d. Transportation
  - e. Other (please specify)
4. Was FWS the first paid employment you have ever had?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
5. Was FWS your first job you obtained during your postsecondary educational career?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
6. Has your FWS job provided you with opportunities better understand the university you attend?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
7. Has your FWS job provided you with opportunities to develop networks that are related to your academic or career goals?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
8. The following skills are often described as positive outcomes of working in a university setting. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that your FWS experience has helped you to develop these skills



Scale:

1(Strongly Disagree), 2(Disagree), 3(Neutral), 4(Agree), 5(Strongly Agree)

My FWS experience has helped me to develop the following skills:

- a. Interview and resume writing
  - b. Customer Service
  - c. Communication
  - d. Time Management
  - e. Leadership
  - f. Professional Etiquette being in an office environment
9. What kind of impact has your FWS experience had on your academic achievement?
- 1(Very Negative), 2(Negative), 3(Neutral), 4(Positive), 5(Very Positive)
10. What kind of impact has your FWS employment had on your career development?
- 1(Very Negative), 2(Negative), 3(Neutral), 4(Positive), 5(Very Positive)
11. Have your FWS employer(s) provided a supportive atmosphere for learning and personal development?
- 1(Never), 2(Occasionally), 3(Sometimes), 4 (Usually), 5(Always)
12. How would you rate your overall experience with your FWS employer?
- 1(Very Negative), 2(Negative), 3(Neutral), 4(Positive), 5(Very Positive)
13. What are some of the ways you have been able to make your FWS experience beneficial for your academic and career goals?

14. What are some of the things you believe you might have done differently to maximize your FWS experience?
15. What advice would you give to future FWS participants to get the most from their FWS experience?

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