

What We Know about the Place of Work in the Academic Life of UW Undergraduates

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INTRODUCTION

The University of Washington's (UW's) Enrollment Management Advisory Council (EMAC) has been asked by the President and Provost to investigate and recommend courses of action to address the effects of insufficient need based funding on UW students and academic programs. The number of lower-income students at UW is growing beyond the capacity of allocated state funding to meet state need grant eligibility and placing increasing demands on UW institutional resources to fund the Husky Promise. The increasing cost of college attendance is affecting students from middle-income families as well, a wide spread phenomenon now referred to as the "middle class squeeze."

Students are sometimes able to fund part or all of their education by working while enrolled. In light of the increasing fiscal burden on students, EMAC requested that the Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) undertake a brief study on the worklife of UW students. After discussing the focus and method of the study with members of the EMAC, we felt it would be useful to first identify what is generally known about college employment from published research and information available on UW students. This preliminary report presents those initial findings. It summarizes information from the published literature, a recent survey of undergraduates at UW Seattle, and statistics on the UW Work Study program. The report concludes with a proposal for further study.

WHAT WE KNOW

The Literature and Recent News

An important and comprehensive resource that provides current research on the topic of college students' work lives is *Understanding the working college student: New research and its implications for policy and practice* (2010), edited by Laura Perna and published by Stylus Publishing, LLC.

In addition, three key resources—two UW reports on retention (2006 and 2014) and a national summary of information on the college student experience (2005)—provide information about the benefits of student employment during college and some related challenges.¹ Following are the major findings from these and other selected resources.

Benefits of working in college

The literature suggests that students benefit from working up to 15 hours/week compared with not working at all or working more than 20 hours per week,² and furthermore, working on campus may confer more benefits than working off campus.

- A number of studies have found that working 10-15 hours/week on campus increases persistence, GPA, and graduation rates.³
- Students who work in college earn higher salaries after college than do students who do not work.⁴
- Working on campus often integrates students into the life of the campus and/or to their majors; such integration is linked to persistence and completion.⁵ Students who work on campus tend to be more engaged with effective educational practices than students who do not work or who work off campus.⁶

- A recent study on college stopouts and dropouts showed that the probability of dropping out is lower for students who receive Work Study aid than those who receive loans.⁷ The authors argue that “loans must be paid back and may be seen as a drain on future income; work-study aid may both integrate the student more closely to the college and provide a convenient income source.”

Challenges associated with working in college

When students are employed more than 20 hours a week, working becomes a disadvantage rather than an advantage, challenging students’ abilities to complete their degrees.

- Research has shown that students who work more than 20 hours per week are at risk for dropping or stopping out,⁸ and this is confirmed by national statistics on the persistence of college students who work full time.⁹

Nevertheless, increases in college costs and limitations on financial aid may make longer work hours necessary to meet the fiscal demands of attending college.

- A recent study by ASUW students (2014) showed that it is almost impossible to pay for college costs by working year-round without supplementing that work with loans.¹⁰ Even students whose parents were fully supporting college costs report leaving the UW because of the burden of those costs on their parents.¹¹

Work-study issues in the national news

Recognizing the unique potential of Work Study programs to integrate students into campus life while helping to fund their education, several questions have arisen lately in national discussions.

- How can institutions increase the number of work-study positions on campus to take advantage of the benefits to students of working on campus versus off campus?
- How can institutions make work-study more relevant to student learning—either by linking work-study positions to majors/career paths more intentionally or by getting students to reflect on and articulate what they are learning from whatever their work-study job may be?¹²
- Do the institutions and students who need work-study the most have fair access to it, given the way federal work-study dollars are allocated?¹³

Results from UW’s Survey of the Student Experience at the Research University (SERU)

A recent survey administered at the UW provided information about the number of hours undergraduate students worked while enrolled at UW Seattle and the relationship between their time at work and other aspects of students’ academic experience.

The Student Experience at the Research University (SERU) Survey began as a research project at the University of California Berkeley’s Center for Studies in Higher Education (CSHE). The questionnaire is comprised of a core set of items addressing student academic engagement, time allocation, academic and personal development, institutional climate for diversity, plans and aspirations, overall satisfaction, and evaluation of students’ academic majors.

The SERU was administered at UW Seattle during spring quarter 2014 to all currently enrolled undergraduates (N=27, 398).¹⁴ A total of 7,097 (26%) students responded.¹⁵ Following is a summary of responses to selected questions from the 2014 SERU administration at UW Seattle.

As Figure 1 shows, among survey respondents, 3,714 (52%) reported working for pay at least part-time.

One-third (34%) of working students were employed on campus, about one-half (54%) off campus, and 12% both on and off campus.

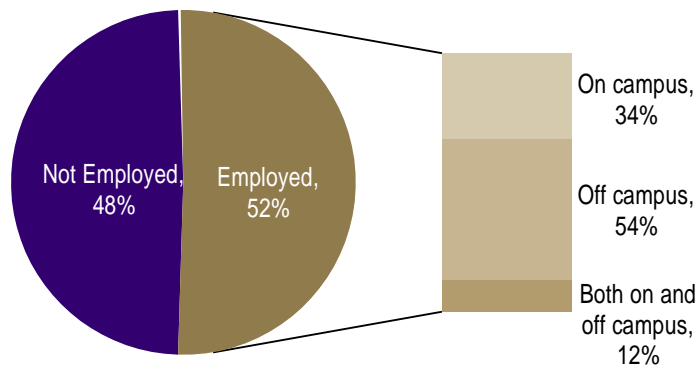


Figure 1. Employment status and location among UW undergraduate students

As shown in Figure 2, the lowest rate of student employment was found among students who planned to work as engineers or computer programmers or who had “no idea whatsoever” which field they would like to enter. The highest percentage of students working occurred among those intending to go into artistic or creative professions, health related professions, or civil service/government.¹⁶

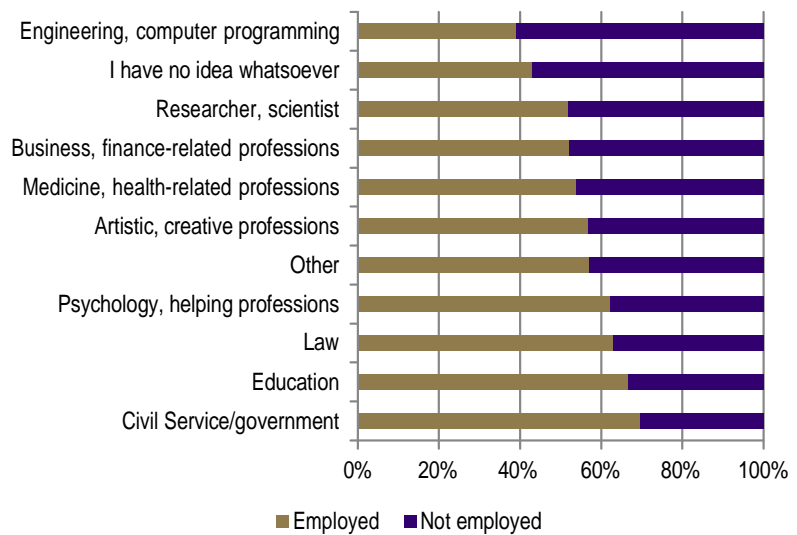


Figure 2. Percentage of working students by career plans

Figure 3 shows that the student employment rate increased with class level, that women were more likely to be employed than were men, and that Asian American students were less likely to work than were under-represented minorities or white Americans. International students were the least likely to be employed. Working status did not differ by first generation status or UW GPA.

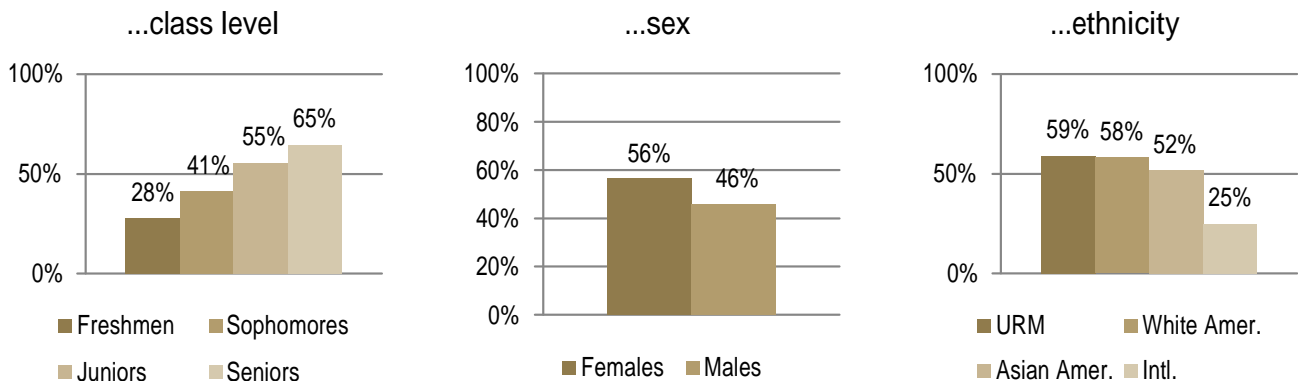


Figure 3. Percentage of working students by...

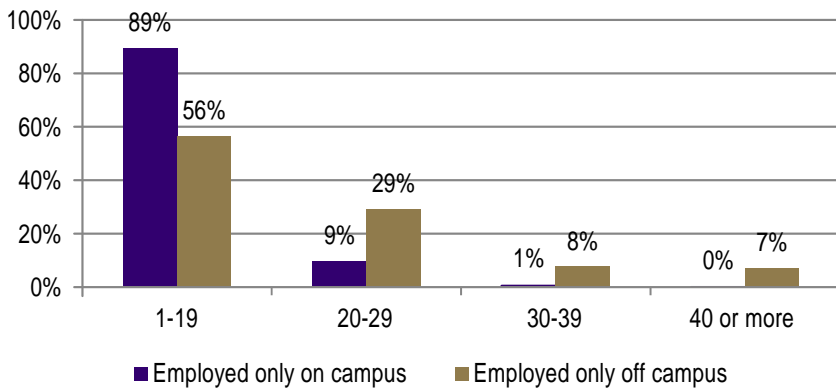


Figure 4. Number of hours worked per week on and off campus

As Figure 4 indicates, the majority (65%) of working students were employed fewer than 20 hours per week.

Students who worked on campus tended to work fewer hours than did students who worked off campus.

Students who worked on campus were more likely to have jobs related to their academic interests than were students who worked off campus.

As shown in Figure 5, approximately half of working students held jobs that were unrelated to their academic interests and this was more likely to be true of students who were working off campus than among those who held on campus jobs (62% versus 52%).

Conversely, a higher percentage of students who worked on campus indicated that the majority (more than 75%) of their work was related to their academic interests than did students who worked off campus (30% versus 22%).

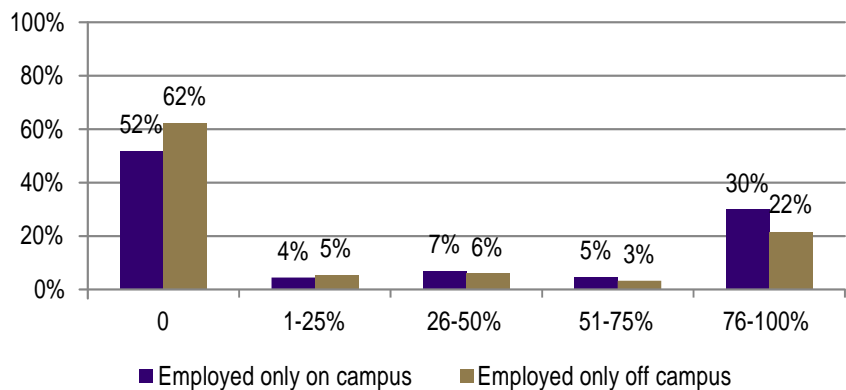


Figure 5. Percentage of work related to academic interests

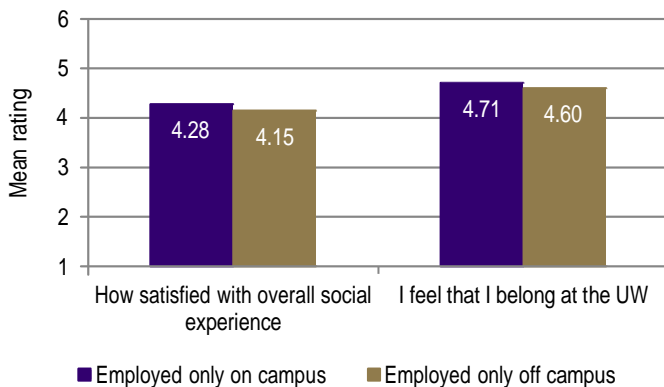


Figure 6. Student satisfaction and sense of belonging

As shown in Figure 6, when compared to students who worked off campus, students who worked on campus were somewhat more...

...satisfied with their social experience at the UW

...likely to feel that they belonged at the UW

Scale: 6 = Very satisfied/Strongly agree
 5 = Satisfied / Agree
 4 = Somewhat satisfied / Somewhat agree
 3 = Somewhat dissatisfied / Somewhat disagree
 2 = Dissatisfied / Disagree
 1 = Very dissatisfied / Strongly disagree

Post-graduation plans of freshmen differed from those of seniors. As Figure 7 shows, freshmen were more likely to expect to attend graduate or professional school (41%) after graduation than to work full time (31%); many had no plans as yet (14%).¹⁷ Student plans were not related to whether or where students worked.

In contrast, seniors were more likely to expect to work full time (45%) after graduation than to go to graduate or professional school (28%). This difference was greatest for students who were currently employed off campus. About 49% of seniors working off campus expected to work full time compared with 25% who planned to go to graduate or professional school. Seniors working on campus were more evenly split in their intentions, with 39% planning to work full time and 35% planning to go to graduate or professional school.

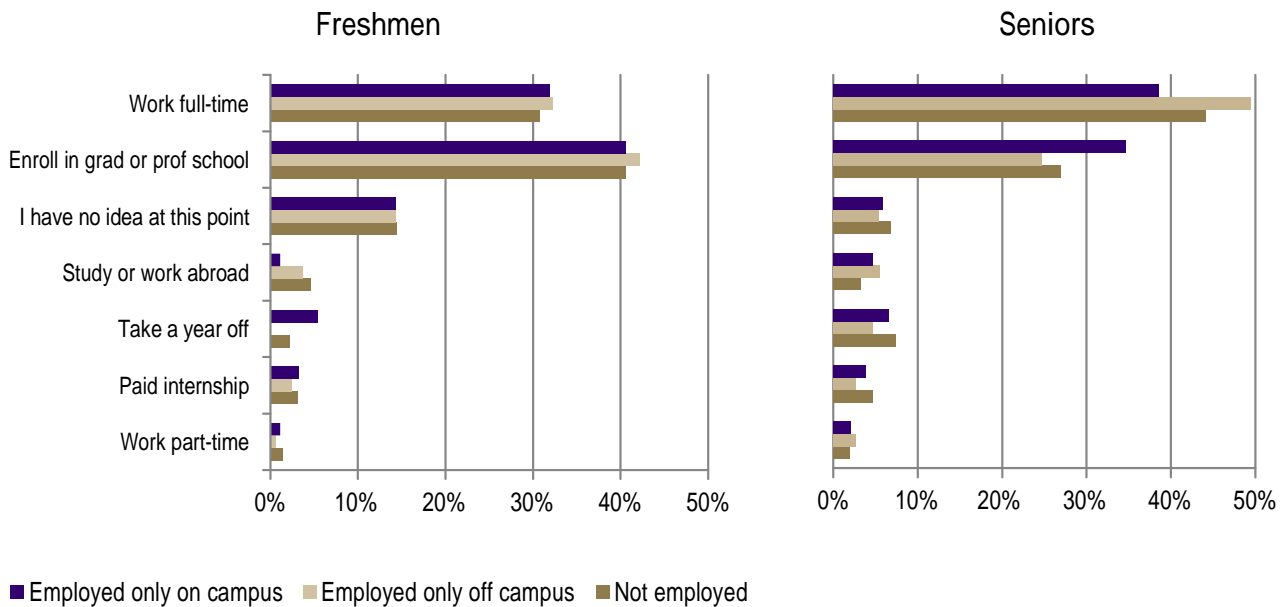


Figure 7. Location of work related to student post-graduation plans

As shown in Figure 8, Asian American students were slightly more likely than under-represented minority and white American students to be employed on campus, and most employed international students worked on campus. First generation students were slightly less likely to work on campus than were other students. Work location did not differ by student gender or UW GPA.

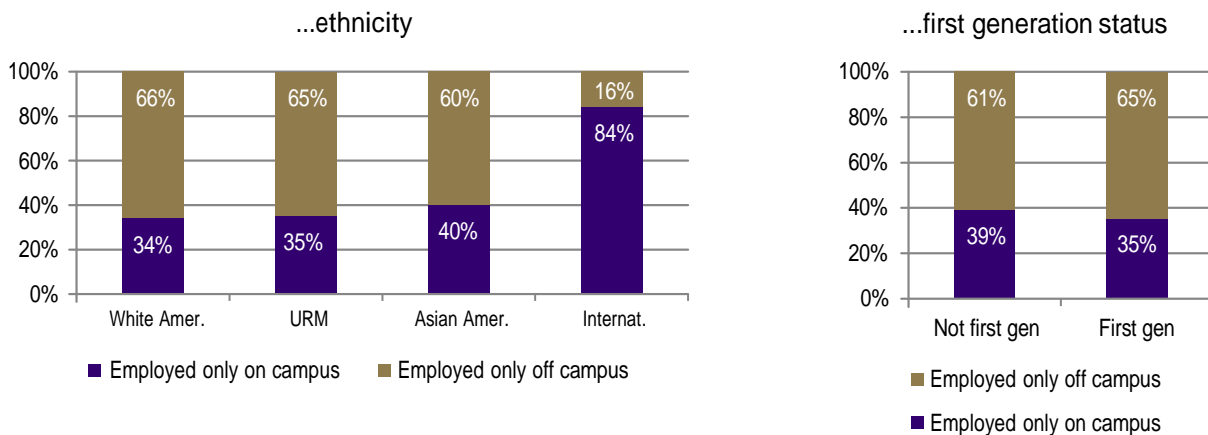


Figure 8. Work location by...

Work Study¹⁸

The Federal Work Study and Washington State Work Study Programs provide an opportunity for students to work part-time while going to school. To qualify for Work Study jobs, students must demonstrate financial need and have a Work Study award as part of their overall financial aid package. Awards are made at the beginning of each academic year and students are able to reduce their loan debt by earning part of their aid eligibility by working part-time.

According to Tim Wold, Associate Director of Financial Aid at UW, under the Work Study program, employers pay a portion of the student's wages; the rest is subsidized by federal or state funds. The portion of student salaries that employers pay increased radically from 40% in 2008 to 60% in 2014. Jobs may be located on or off campus with government agencies, non-profit organizations or private corporations. However, Wold noted that off campus private corporations have reduced the number of Work Study positions available to students since 2008. Many of these off campus worksites offered career-related and/or community service experience. For example, positions with the America Reads/America Counts and Jump Start programs are included among Work Study job listings.

Work Study students may work up to 19 hours per week and pay rates are the same as for comparable, non-Work Study jobs. According to Wold, no job pays less than the prevailing minimum wage.

To provide context for this report, we have requested the information from the Financial Aid Office for 2003-2004, 2005-2006, and 2013-2014 as follows:

- The amount of federal and Washington State Work Study funding available (Table 1 shows student earnings. We are unsure whether this is the same as funding available.)
- Employer portion of student wage for Work Study students (Table 2 shows this information for later years only. Intermediate comparison year provided because percentages changed in 2006-2007.)
- Number of Work Study jobs and positions available (This information not yet available. Note that there may be more than one position open for a given job.)
- Number of Work Study positions filled (Table 3 shows the number of students in Work Study positions.)
- Number of students eligible for Work Study students, number receiving Work Study awards, and number who awarded Work Study who did not use it (This information not yet available.)

The information we have received to date is shown below.

Table 1. Student gross earnings (may be equivalent of total funding available)

	2003-2004	2005-2006		2013-2014	
	\$	\$	% change from 2003-2005	\$	% change from 2003-2005
Federal Work Study funding	2,544,265	2,356,874	-7%	2,573,445	1%
Washington State Work Study funding	1,578,633	1,739,546	10%	1,116,318	-29%
Total Work Study funding	4,122,898	4,096,420	-1%	3,689,763	-11%

Table 2. Employer portion of student wage

	2003-2004	2005-2006	2013-2014
	%	%	%
UW employers		25%	40%
America Counts/Reads and Jump Start	0%	0%	0%
Non-profit organizations ("community service")		25-30%	25-30%
Other employers		35%	65%

Table 3. Number of students in Work Study positions

	2003-2004	2005-2006		2013-2014	
	N	N	% change from 2003-2005	N	% change from 2003-2005
On campus (state)	211	298	41%	267	27%
On campus (federal)	851	810	-5%	669	-21%
Off campus (state)	244	201	-18%	77	-68%
Off campus (federal; "community service")	29	52	79%	98	238%
Governmental (federal)	7	6	-14%	2	-71%
America Reads/Counts and Jump Start (federal)	126	92	-27%	129	2%
Total	1468	1459	-1%	1242	-15%

PROPOSED STUDY

This report provides preliminary information about the relationship between work and retention, about where and how much UW students work while pursuing their undergraduate degrees, and about the UW Work Study program. We propose to expand on what we know by conducting a brief mixed methods study asking UW students about the place of work in their academic and personal lives. This study will assist EMAC in understanding the “role of work in the lives of UW students” and to “develop a more intentional approach to Work Study at the University.”¹⁹

The study will be conducted during winter and early spring quarters of 2015. It will include a short survey of undergraduate students enrolled at UW Seattle and two student focus groups. The particular questions to be addressed will be confirmed with EMAC members; a list of possibilities is provided below. The survey will be administered to all current Work Study students (identified by the Work Study office) and a randomly selected sample of other students (both working and not working). We will follow the survey with two focus groups of students employed on campus. One group will be made up of Work Study and the other of non-Work Study students. Results from the survey and focus group will be combined with this preliminary report and presented to EMAC in May, 2015. A cost estimate and preliminary timeline is shown at the end of this document.

If the EMAC timeline permits, another option is to present survey items as part of the SERU survey to be administered this spring. This alternative would reduce the survey burden on UW students but would delay reporting until July 2015.

Table 2. Possible questions of interest to be address in student survey and focus groups

1. General	<p>What are the jobs that students are working at?</p> <p>What do they pay?</p> <p>What are students funding with those jobs?</p> <p>What sources of income do students have in addition to those jobs?</p>
2. Finding the job	<p>How did students find those jobs?</p> <p>How easy was the job-finding process?</p> <p>Did students consider but turn down any jobs in the process of finding one?</p> <p>Did students receive any help from UW in finding those jobs? If so, what help and how helpful was it?</p> <p>If students could improve the job-finding process in any way, how would they improve it?</p>
3. Learning	<p>What are students learning from the work they are doing—both generally, personally, and academically?</p> <p>How closely connected is students’ work to students’ academic studies?</p> <p>What do students feel is the most positive aspect of working on campus?</p> <p>What do students feel is the most negative aspect of working on campus?</p>

(TABLE CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

Table 2. Possible questions of interest to be address in student survey and focus groups (continued)

4. Supervision	What kind of support do students working on campus get from supervisors? Are there kinds of support they would like to have but are not getting from supervisors?
5. Other	How do students compare campus work with work they may have had off-campus? Are there differences between Work Study jobs and other campus jobs? If so, what are those differences?

ENDNOTES

- ¹ McGhee, D. and N. Lowell. (2014). Student Experience at the Research University (SERU) Survey 2014: Method and Student Participation. OEA Report 14-02. <http://www.washington.edu/oea/services/research/assessment/seru.html>
- Pascarella, E. T. and Terenzini, RT. (2005). *How College Affects Students, Volume 2, A Third. Decade of Research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Pitre, E., C. Beyer, S. Lemire, and C. Snyder. (2006). *University of Washington Study of Attrition and Retention 2006*. <http://www.washington.edu/oea/pdfs/reports/UWSTARReport.pdf>
- ² Pascarella and Terenzini, op. cit.
- Perna, L., Ed. (2010). *Understanding the working college student: New research and its implications for policy and practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* (2nd edition). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- ³ Perna, op. cit. and Perna in <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2012/09/13/consider-pros-and-cons-of-working-in-college>.
- ⁴ Titus in Perna, op. cit.
- ⁵ Tinto, op. cit.
- ⁶ McCormick, Moore, and Kuh in Perna, op. cit.
- ⁷ Stratton. L.S., D.M. O'Toole, and J.N. Wetzal. (2005). Published in: *Economics of Education Review*, 2008, 27 (3), 319-331.
- ⁸ Tinto, op. cit.
- ⁹ Pitre, Beyer, Lemire, and Snyder, op. cit.
- ¹⁰ ASUW Student Debt Reduction Working Group. (June 2013). *Meet us in the middle: Affordability for the working student*. <http://www.asuw.org/files/2014/06/MeetInTheMiddle1.pdf>
- ¹¹ Pitre, et al, op. cit., p. 43.
- ¹² Gose, B. (September 15, 2014). *How to make students' campus jobs more meaningful*. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Perna, op. cit., pp. 286-96.
- ¹³ Scott-Clayton, J. (September 9, 2011). *A jobs program in need of reform*. *New York Times*.
- ¹⁴ For additional information on UW SERU administrations, see <http://www.washington.edu/oea/services/research/assessment/seru.html>
- ¹⁵ Unfortunately, this low response rate is typical of large surveys, including SERU administrations at other AAU institutions. Low response rates introduce the risk of "non-response bias," that is, students who do not respond may be different in important ways than those who do respond. This risk increases with the proportion of non-responders. For this SERU administration, the group of non-responders was three times as great as responders, and survey results should be considered as suggestive rather than definitive.
- ¹⁶ Response categories not reported due to low response: Agriculture/agribusiness and Military.
- ¹⁷ Response categories not reported due to low response: Be self-employed; Do something else; Join armed forces; Unpaid internship/volunteer.
- ¹⁸ This description is excerpted from the UW Financial Aid website: <http://www.washington.edu/students/osfa/ugaid/workstudy.html>.
- ¹⁹ EMAC. (July 7, 2014). *Possible courses of action derived from the conversations and work of the enrollment advisory council (EMAC)*. Internal UW working document.