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## Our University – Student Work

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## Our University – Student Work

In a study from the early part of this century, *Learning and Earning: Working in College* by Orszag and others, it was found that students who work a reasonable number of hours per week while enrolled in college, say 8 to 12 hours, actually perform better academically than students who do not work.

A student working 20 or more hours per week and enrolled for a full-time course load may be hurt academically, but an increasing number of students are doing just that to address the issue of rising college costs.

U.S. PIRG, the federation of state Public Interest Research Groups, published a study in 2002 which suggested that 46% of all full-time working students work 25 or more hours per week, and that 42% of these students reported that working hurt their grades. Reduced scheduling availability and course selection compound high levels of work commitments. These are negative indicators for student work to be sure.

Minnesota Public Radio ran a story a few years ago that supported these general findings but also suggested that the University of Minnesota provided good jobs for student workers that allowed them to work on campus to offset increasing costs. MPR reported that a growing number of students are working as part of the college attendance package and planning for jobs as they seek classes as a way to “balance the budget” at the local level.

In a June 8, 2009 piece in Higher Education News Doug Lederman found what everyone finds. Over half of all full-time students work; many more than 20 hours per week. And over 80% of all part-time students work. There is no formula for how to best fit together the pieces of the puzzle that college students face.

Many studies correctly point out the difference between working on-campus and off-campus. On-campus employment provides a number of powerful positives for students.

This is where the good universities will spring into action.

I know that at Southern an Undergraduate Assistantship program in 2002 provided on-campus jobs to students that were related to their areas of study and interest, working with faculty or professional staff in a variety of experience enriching roles.

It worked so well that demand for these positions continues to outweigh the funds available to support them. The goal was simply to provide meaningful work experience as part of the undergraduate learning experience because it was good for the student and good for the university.

The increasing costs of higher education must be brought under control, no doubt about it. In so doing, quality must be maintained, no doubt about that either.

There is no single fix for addressing the increasing costs of university attendance. It will take a multi-pronged attack that shakes the roots of the institutions.

One thing that good universities can do is help reconfigure the role of being a college student on campus so that it might include the opportunity to do personally and institutionally useful work that reduces costs for both.

Making a budget balance at a public university requires hundreds of acts of innovation and efficiency; examining the role of the student and his or her relationship to the university is one of them.

Student workers could attain scheduling attention similar to what is provided to student athletes, treating work as a powerful and important part of university life.

Like athletics.

At our university, and others like it, positive student work opportunities will benefit both the institution and the individual.