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Maximizing Student Integration through Student Employment: A Study of the First-Year College Student Work Experience

Amanda Duhon
Macalester College

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Author: Amanda Duhon

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A Study of the First-Year College Student Work Experience

Amanda Duhon

Sociology Honors Project

Deborah Smith, Advisor

Macalester College

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Abstract

This study adds to the current research on student support systems and integration among first-year college students, using in-depth interviews to assess how student employment acts as a form of social support. Research identifies social support as a necessary component of college integration and retention rates. However, most research focuses on living, learning, and extracurricular spaces, failing to include student employment as a source of integration. This research addresses this deficiency, showing that students place high value on the social job aspects, that they have positive social interactions, and that their jobs contribute to their social and physical integration to college. I offer an explanation for the difference in job satisfaction between food service employees and all other jobs, isolating specific job characteristics that make the food services job less satisfactory. These findings offer insight into how universities can improve student integration through modifications to certain aspects of student employment.

Introduction

Colleges have long sought explanations for student attrition and retention rates to better adapt their resources to supporting the needs of students. The widely accepted model for predicting attrition rates states that students are more likely to withdraw from college if not sufficiently integrated into the social, academic, and value systems of their college (Tinto 1975). Reflecting this concern with student integration, researchers have investigated a wide variety of specific forums for student integration in a college context, including extracurricular activities, residential spaces, academic spaces, interactions with other students, and interactions with faculty (Christie and Dinham 1991; Carini, Kuh, and Klein 2006; Jacobs and Archie 2007; Lanasa, Olsen, and Alleman 2007). This research points out that student integration happens in multiple college contexts, indicating the need to assess other contexts, such as student employment, as possible sources of student integration. This study proposes that by providing social support, student employment is an important source of social integration for first year college students.

Roughly 65% of students enrolled at the study institution are eligible for the part-time, often on-campus work for students with demonstrated financial need (Federal Work-Study Program 2010). Students who participate in the work-study program work approximately 10-15 hours per week compared to the average 12 hours per week they spend in class. These numbers indicate work-study may play a significant role in the lives of full-time college student workers. Further, from a general work perspective, "Even when work conditions are relatively unpleasant, and the tasks involved dull, work tends to be a structuring element in people's psychological makeup and the cycle of their daily activities" (Giddens 2006: 357). The potential integrative benefits of student employment

are a valuable contribution given the importance colleges place on successful student integration.

In order to better understand the role of work-study in the integration process of the first-year college student, I conducted in-depth interviews with seventeen sophomores about their work-study experiences during their first year at a small liberal arts college. I attempt to explain the relevance of social support to student integration, if and how work-study serves as a tool for integration and why this is important to institutions of higher education. I address these questions by assessing what aspects of their job students value, what they gain from their employment and if these gains are dependent on job type.

This study proposes that similar to academic and residential settings, student employment is an important source of social integration for first year college students. While previous research shows term-time work as detracting from students' social integration to college life (Broadbridge and Swanson 2005), I explore the possibility that the college setting and the increased opportunities for students to learn about the college, whether physically, socially, or academically, increase student integration gains. This difference in setting may also account for the difference in valued job aspects, with student workers placing more value on connections to the institution rather than extrinsic values like money and job security (Ross, Schwartz, and Surkiss 1999, Knoop 1994). Additionally, using my findings on variation in type of employment, I offer insight into how universities can improve first-year student integration through modifications to certain aspects of student employment.

This paper begins with a review of the relevant sociological literature on student integration in higher education. Here I examine existing definitions for social support and

integration in the context of student life, and redefine these definitions for the purposes of this study. I then draw on existing student employment and integration literature to highlight how this study fills the gap by bridging these fields and showing how student employment could contribute to successful college integration. I then draw on the related sociology of work literature, comparing and contrasting student labor with general labor in the service industry. Through these comparisons I aim to extend the insights made in the general sociology of work literature to the less studied field of student employment, particularly when examining the food service sector of student employment. Finally, I give a detailed analysis of how employment provides social support, how it affects the academic and social lives of students, and the aspects of employment valued by students. I then use my findings as evidence that colleges should increase their focus on student employment as a tool for maximizing student engagement and integration.

Literature Review

Defining Social Support

Prior research identifies social support as key component of student integration.. In his work on student integration, Tinto clarifies that interactions alone do not imply integration; rather integration “depends on the character of those interactions and the manner in which individuals come to perceive them (1987:27). Using Tinto’s argument as a premise, a study of first-year students at a UK university defines these meaningful interactions as forms of “social support” (Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld 2005). In their analysis, Wilcox et al. contend that social support has been identified as a vital component for successful adjustment to university life, but there has been a lack of qualitative research examining the types and sources of support that students receive

(Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld 2005). Likewise, similar studies looking at the institutional and external factors contributing to student integration focus on the shortcomings in integration rather than the types of support (Christie and Dinham 1991).

Studies in this vein attempt to expand Tinto's premise by looking at sources of support beyond the academic setting including material and residential components, but fail to include on-campus employment as a potential source of social support (Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld 2005, Christie and Dinham 1991). However, there is research that shows that social support is not a factor that should be overlooked. In a study on the relationship between student adjustment to university life and support types, Ramsay, Jones, and Barker acknowledge the necessity of social support, providing evidence that perceived social support can reduce the psychological impact of stressful situations and contribute positively to academic achievement (2006).

Drawing from the definitions and conceptions of support and integration put forth by Tinto and the theorists that followed him, this study defines social support as any social interaction that contributes to the social integration of a student, and integration as a conversion to the social, academic, and value systems of the college (Tinto 1975, Ramsay, Jones, and Barker 2006, Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gould 2005). Here, integration is the broader term, encompassing both social and physical integration.

Student Employment as a Source of Social Support

Scholars have yet to closely study on-campus student employment as a possible source of social support. Current literature on student employment focuses primarily on the positive and negative effects of working for full-time students and how this relates to

the number of hours they work (Broadbridge and Swanson 2005; 2006, Staff and Mortimer 2007). For instance, in their study of the effects of employment on academic success, Kulm and Cramer find that while working a higher number of hours (35 or more per week) does negatively impact student engagement and academic success, students who work on-campus with limited hours (8-10) do not suffer in the same way (2006). Moreover, in their study of the effects of term-time employment, Ford, Bosworth, and Wilson (2005) found that over a quarter of the students saw their jobs as a positive contribution to their social lives.

However, researchers in this field have addressed the need for more research dealing with the social and integrative benefits of student employment. Kulm and Cramer acknowledge that, “depending on the type of employment a student has, the student may actually find their job provides the socializing needed to stay connected” (2006: 932). However, Kulm and Cramer’s claim presents an opportunity for further research due to the lack of literature exploring how the type of student employment may affect the level of social support received by students (2006, Broadbridge and Swanson 2005). Broadbridge and Swanson make a similar call stating that, “none of these studies has considered the impact of student’s employment on the overall quality of the university experience and adjustment to university life” (2005:237). Additionally, the literature on quality of student life fails to examine the integration of student roles with student employment (Broadbridge and Swanson 2005).

Maximizing Student Engagement

Colleges are now starting to focus on engaging students both in and out of the classroom to create more opportunities for successful student integration. Similar to

integration studies, the bulk of student engagement literature focuses on academic and residential sectors, while neglecting to consider employment as a possible arena for engagement (Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo 2006). However, in a study of the benefits of student employment, Lewis (2008) acknowledges a need to increase student gains from mandatory work-study employment. He calls for increased informal interactions between students, faculty members, and administrators, alluding to the benefits of supportive relations with co-workers (Lewis 2008). The literature on perceived support in the workplace stresses the importance of positive relationships with faculty and supervisors, showing that the supervisor is often the prime determinant of a perceived supportive working environment (Fisher 1985, Cummins 1990, Beehr 1990, Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe 2003, Madlock 2008, Ng and Sorenson 2008). This research expands on Lewis's work by providing additional information on the job aspects valued by student workers, identifying possible ways university administrators can increase student gains.

Job Type and Job Satisfaction

Research in the sociology of work has established links between job type and job satisfaction. For instance, Blauner observed a descending range of job satisfaction from business professionals to unskilled manual workers, attributing these differences to variation in occupation prestige, degree of independence and autonomy, and degree to which workers interact outside of work (1960). Likewise, Hodson and Sullivan allude to the relevancy of job type in determining satisfaction, isolating autonomy, belongingness, technology, organizational characteristics, and prior expectations as key characteristics of

job type (2002). Further, studies have pointed to worker preference for jobs that permit meaningful peer and co-worker interaction (Kahn 1972, Fantasia 1988). Building off of these links, this research seeks to understand the relationship between perceived level of support and job satisfaction in student employment. A recent survey designed to measure job satisfaction, benefits, and supervisor relations at the same institution asked students to rate their overall job satisfaction. It found varying levels of satisfaction across different job types, with significantly low satisfaction among food service employees (Bigler-Johnson et al. 2010). I address this variation and isolate the specific job characteristics that contribute to their dissatisfaction. Notably, student food service jobs share characteristics with other service sector jobs, both classified as “people-work” or centered on interactions with people (Mann 2004, Brotheridge and Grandy 2002). This characteristic may cause student food service workers to employ coping strategies to deal with the stress of their jobs (Mann 2004).

Bigler-Johnson et al. also asked participants to state whether or not they value specific job characteristics including: time to do homework, learning a set of skills, gaining work experience, making connections with faculty or staff, providing a service to the college, and receiving information about the college (2010). According to their results, students place the most value on making connections with faculty/staff, learning a set of skills, and providing a service to the college (Bigler-Johnson et al. 2010). However, survey options restricted student responses, making it unclear whether or not students might assign value to other job elements. This research acts as a follow-up to this study, specifically addressing the value students assign to having a supportive job environment and making connections to fellow student workers, supervisors, and the student body.

Additionally, this study incorporates insights of sociology of work research regarding variations in job satisfaction by job type and job characteristics, extending these insights to the college student work context.

Significance

This study aims to fill the gap of literature on the impact of type of student employment on the overall adjustment to university life by examining student employment's potential role as a source of social support. It adds to the depth of existing research on social integration which currently focuses on other sources of social support i.e. academic, residential, and extracurricular. It also identifies the characteristics of specific job types, i.e. food service, that may detract from perceived social support and integration. This information could help universities tailor student employment to function as a meaningful form of student engagement. As noted by Broadbridge and Swanson (2005), universities need a greater understanding of variation in social support depending on type of student employment in order to understand how to maximize the benefits of student employment for students and employers.

Research Design

Choice of Method

This study uses interviews as the primary method of data collection. Though a qualitative approach limits the sample, in-depth interviews allow for a broader understanding of the role of work-study in the larger context of student's lives. Unlike other research methods, interviews allow participants to discuss their perceptions and experiences of their work-study job, helping to explain the causes of their satisfaction, the intricacies of their social relationships, and why they value particular job aspects. Related

studies on student integration, the role of social support in higher education, and the role management of a student worker employ a qualitative approach in order to provide a more in-depth analysis of identified trends in student integration and support systems in higher education (Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld 2005; Ramsay, Jones, and Barker 2007; Broadbridge and Swanson 2006). Further, the authors of the related survey study on student employment specifically call for more research on the differences between job categories and the use of in-depth interviews (Bigler-Johnson et al. 2010). Like any qualitative study, the small sample size and limitations of the study population due the type of institution (elite, small liberal arts college) make it difficult to generalize beyond the population in question.

Study Population, Sampling, and Interviews

Population and Sampling. The study population consists of current sophomores at small liberal arts college who responded to an email solicitation because they participated in work-study as first-years during the 2009-2010 school year. I chose sophomores because unlike current freshmen they have a full year of work experience and the experience is still in the recent past, unlike a junior or senior. Additionally, the population excludes students who had previously worked under my supervision in the food service sector. Because this study focuses on social support, I exclude students with the ability to choose a job since they may have previous bonds and systems of support that affect their job choice. The sample includes students from a variety of jobs that fall within the main categories of food services, non-academic office assistants, campus center, facilities, athletics, library, and academic departments. These categories represent variation in number of students working at the same time, amount of interaction with

college faculty, and degree of exposure to campus spaces. The resulting sample consisted of 17 students, 13 females and 4 males.

Interviews. I conducted and tape-recorded all interviews in public campus spaces outside of the students' place of work. I asked participants a set of base questions included in the interview schedule (Appendix A). However, the interviews followed an open format, with questions adjusted depending on the directions the participants chose to go. Though not originally included as part of the interview schedule, students who switched jobs often made comparisons between jobs; so for those students, I asked about both their first and second jobs. For those who remained in the same or similar job, I asked them to expand on why they chose to remain in the job and how their experience differed between years. These provided useful insights into what job aspects students valued and why they did/did not like their initial jobs. However, I only included their responses concerning the jobs they held during their freshmen year in Tables 1 and 2 (Appendix A) because the students' first year experiences were the main focus of this study.

Operationalization and Coding Method

Variables. Job characteristics, social interactions, significance of job in daily life, and perceived value of job represent the primary variables. These categories address the degree to which student employment serves as a form of social support by measuring the importance of social interaction to students' satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the job, the nature of these social interactions, the effect of the job on the students' lives, and the overall value they place on the job.

Job Characteristics. Since this study focuses on whether or not the social aspects of the job were important to students, I coded their responses about job characteristics as either task-related (job duties) or social-related (interactions with other people). These categories are not mutually exclusive as students might mention both task-related and social-related job characteristics.

Social Interactions. In order to further understand the nature and importance of the social aspects of the jobs, I asked students about their interactions with fellow student workers, non-student supervisors, and the student body. For their interactions with fellow student workers, I categorized them as negative, work-only (relationship did not extend beyond job), acquaintance (weak positive relationship outside of job), enhanced relationship (work relationship enhanced a previously existing relationship formed in some other setting), or friend (strong positive relationship outside of job). Students rarely formed any kind of friendship with their supervisors, but often cited their relationship with their supervisor as being a determining factor in their perceived level of support. Therefore, I coded interactions with supervisors as either unsupportive or supportive. Rather than individual relationships, participants often described their relationships with other students as a relationship with the entire student body. The amount or level of interaction seemed to have the most impact on students' job experiences, so I coded for level of interaction: none/minimal, moderate, and significant.

Significance of Job in Daily Life. To evaluate the significance of their jobs in their daily lives, I assess the continuation of the job beyond the shift (did they think about or perform the job after their shift was over) and their perceived necessity of student workers (how necessary was their job to the overall functioning of their workplace). In

order to evaluate job satisfaction beyond the numerical ranking and their least favorite aspects, I look at the effects of the job on academic and social lives (positive, negative, or neutral).

Perceived Value of Job. Finally, I asked students to explain why and if they valued their job. The majority of their responses fell into the categories I outline in Table 1 (Appendix A). I distinguish between understanding the physical place (navigating buildings and locating things) and understanding or connecting to the school (enhanced knowledge of how the school or school personnel operates, what events are happening on campus, or how to use specific resources related to the school).

Findings

This research reveals that students place high value on the social aspects of their jobs. Overall, they have positive social interactions with co-workers, supervisors, and the student body, making for a supportive work environment, and many of their jobs contribute to their integration and understanding of the college environment, both socially and physically. Additionally I offer an explanation for the dramatic difference in job satisfaction between food service employees and all other job categories that was cited in the earlier survey of student employment (Bigler-Johnson et al. 2010). Despite varying levels of job satisfaction, my findings show that students across all job types still gain social support and integration into college life. Similar to academic and residential settings, student employment is an important source of social integration for first year college students.

"They Knew My Name and Asked How I was Doing": Student Reflections on Job Aspects

Many of the student workers interviewed genuinely liked being in their work environment, even if they didn't always enjoy the tasks of the job. I asked students to tell me about their favorite and least favorite parts, and students' favorite parts often included the people they worked with, while their least favorite parts were some of the job tasks. Their jobs provided the opportunity to get to know non-student workers and commiserate with fellow students about the stresses of academic life. Though a seemingly small detail, many students reflected happily that even if they no longer worked in their original job, the people they worked with remembered them and cared about how they are doing. Sarah, a food service worker, notes, "It was really cool to have that personal relationship with them [non-student coworkers]. And now they still know my name and say hi to me when I am there." These findings are consistent with Hodson and Sullivan's identified worker needs of belongingness and meaningful interaction with peers and co-workers (2002).

The job characteristics data is based on three questions: students' favorite parts of the job, least favorite parts of the job, and the characteristics they would want in an ideal student job. The social aspects of the job were meaningful to students; 71% noted a social aspect as being one of their favorite parts, and only 29% mentioned a social aspect as being one of their least favorite parts (Table 1). Ashley, who worked in the library, explains,

I don't feel very passionate about the work I do in the library. It's more just earning money and that's it. So there aren't really aspects of the work I do that I like, but in terms of the job it's nice that I get to pick my hours and I like that I

can strike up conversations with the person who is working at the same time as me. I might normally not talk to them, so it's a nice way to pass the time.

Ashley was one of several workers to make a distinction between the work and the job, associating work with the often neutral or negative tasks, and the job as a more encompassing term that included time to socialize and do homework in addition to the work component. Although, she did not like any of the work she did, she rated her job satisfaction as a 9, indicating that the social factors played an important role. This distinction aligns with the following definition of work: “We often associate the notion of work with drudgery—with a set of tasks that we want to minimize and, if possible, escape from altogether” (Giddens 2006: 357).

One other interesting finding is the variation between students' favorite parts and the characteristics of their ideal job. Although students more frequently mentioned social aspects as compared to task-related aspects as being their favorite part, when asked about their ideal job, 100% of students mentioned task-related aspects compared to the only 35% who mentioned social aspects (Table 1). This could indicate that students don't value the social aspects as highly as task related aspects. However, based on the interviews, the majority of students noted positive social experiences in their first student employment job, and it could be understood that they would want the positive parts of their first job to exist in their ideal job, making it unnecessary to mention the social aspects. Many conveyed a sense that they were happy with their original jobs and the ideal characteristics were things that would make that job even better. John, who worked a campus center job (a student resource hub), explains, “This one is pretty close to ideal. The only thing that would make it more ideal is something more to do with my major.”

Overall, positive social interactions played a key role in student's enjoyment of their jobs. These interactions took a variety of forms including interactions with their fellow student workers, their supervisors, the student body, and co-workers and clients not directly connected to the school. The next section explores the nature of these interactions, specifically those with student workers, supervisors, and the student body, since these were present for almost all of the students surveyed. These findings support the research on both on-campus and off-campus student employment showing that students enjoyed their employment and saw it as an enhancing factor to their social life (Ford et. al 1995). However, while Ford et al. found this to be the case among only a quarter of the students interviewed, it was evident among closer to three-fourths of the students I interviewed (1995). This difference likely occurs since Ford et. al studied mainly off-campus student workers, while I primarily interviewed student's working in on-campus jobs, providing them with potentially more connection to their co-workers and working environment. As Erin, a food service worker, explains,

I think because I am a student here, I had an experience that was very catered to my personal place in life. If I had been somewhere else I don't think I would have received that and I don't think I would have felt as connected with everyone at the job, but I still think I would have enjoyed it.

Friendly not Friends: Interactions with Co-workers, Supervisors, and the Student Body

Interactions with Student Workers. Acquaintance was the most common relationship that students had with their fellow student workers. Here, I define acquaintance as someone with whom they interacted positively during their job shift, and with whom they briefly interacted with when they saw each other outside of work time.

Occasionally a student might eat a meal or study with an acquaintance but rarely made plans to do so. Jake, who works in an academic department, describes,

Sometimes I had meals with them. Like if we both would leave work at the same time we would just come to eat together. Nothing that really required intensive planning happened, but if we were both out in the same place or saw each other in transit we would stop and talk for 5 or 10 minutes. This year if I see them I ask them how are things going and that sort of thing.

Although some students (29%) formed close friendships through their jobs (Table 1), the majority cited their first-year residence halls and friends of friends when asked how they met their closest friends. This is consistent with previous literature citing residence halls and living accommodations as the primary site of social integration for first-year college students (Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld 2005, Christie and Dinham 1991). Living arrangements and orientation activities are typically students' first introduction to the social aspects of college, whereas they usually start their work-study job 1 or 2 weeks into the semester. Several students accounted for their lack of close job friendships, mentioning either the comparatively small amount time spent working versus being in a dorm or the conditions of their job. As David, a facilities worker, explains,

There is nothing inherently different. I think the only thing is that the closer friends I have outside of the job I just happen to spend more time with. So I imagine these people I work with in the shop, if I spent more time with them on just a scheduled or mandatory basis, then we would spend more free time together. It's just a matter of convenience. I wouldn't say that given the same amount time for development, that the relationships are that different.

Citing the specific conditions of her job as a food service worker, Elizabeth notes,

You don't have heart to hearts with people because you get to know them, but every time you get to know them it's for like two minutes at a time. You can't talk for a long time so you don't ever get past that friendly joking level of social interaction. It would be different in a job where you had an hour or two to sit and talk with someone.

Surprisingly, none of the students interviewed mentioned negative relationships with their student co-workers, indicating these were generally positive relationships even if they did not extend beyond the job. Further, although their student employment job did not serve as a primary friend network for most students, some students described their work as a reinforcing space, enhancing relationships they had already formed with people in dorms, classes, or clubs. Work provides an opportunity to spend more time with others and in a different context. David explains, "I guess they are people that I more or less met in the job. Although when I was working in the first few weeks I discovered I had classes with them, so I guess you kind of build that relationship."

The higher number of 'friendly' or acquaintance level relationships rather than true 'friends' does not detract from the argument that employment serves as an important source of social integration for students. As Granovetter explains in his work on the strength of weak ties, "Weak ties are here seen as indispensable to individuals' opportunities and to their integration into communities" (1973:1378) Thus the finding that students tend to form weak ties through their work may point to more significant integration than if these ties were strong.

Interactions with Supervisors. Unlike students' relationships with their co-workers, their relationships with their supervisors rarely extend beyond the job. This is predictable considering factors such as the working dynamic, the gap in age, the fact that their supervisors are generally not students, and that they would be unlikely to see each other outside of work unless planned.

However, the majority of students (82%) cited their relationships with their supervisors as being the main determinant for whether or not they found the job to be a supportive environment. This finding is consistent with the perceived work support literature, which places greater importance on perceived supervisor support as opposed to perceived co-worker support (Fisher 1985, Cummins 1990, Beehr 1990, Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe 2003, Madlock 2008, Ng and Sorenson 2008). Prior research suggests that perceived supervisor support is more important to the overall working environment than perceived co-worker support for several reasons: (1) Workers may see supervisor support as a higher value resource than coworker support due to their position of authority, and (2) Supervisors are expected to provide both instrumental and emotional support as part of their job, thus supervisors may be more likely to offer support, giving them greater skill and experience in providing support than the average coworker (Ng and Sorenson 2008).

Of all students, 88% felt they had a supportive relationship with their supervisor (Table 1). Students often expressed happiness and appreciation for their luck in having a good supervisor. Ashley, a library worker and one of the 82% who described their relationship with their supervisor when asked about whether or not their job was a supportive environment, says,

Definitely. The fact that the supervisors always ask me how I'm doing, and when they leave they say 'have a good night' or 'have a good weekend'. Just the way that they speak to me it makes me feel like 'we honestly appreciate you working here', and they have employee appreciation events with all these cookies and food. Just stuff like that. It's implied 'thanks for working here', and it makes me feel like we're not expendable.

Participants considered supervisors supportive when they took the time to get to know them and ask about their day, with whom they could freely ask questions about job tasks, talk with on an informal basis, and were understanding and willing to let them miss work when stressed about classes or other matters. Their definitions of supervisor support are consistent with Marcus and House's characterization of the ideal human relations supervisor: one whose subordinates find friendly, helpful, unthreatening, and receptive to questions (1973).

Of those who mentioned having an unsupportive relationship with their supervisor (22%), only one felt that her poor relationship with her supervisor was the main reason for her low job satisfaction (3.5), indicating that most students felt that their supervisors positively contributed to their work environment (Table 1, Appendix A).

Interactions with Student Body. Due to the location or the nature of their jobs, the majority of students minimally or moderately interacted with the student body, meaning these interactions did not register to them as significant parts of the job. Those who had significant interactions (29%) were students whose jobs were set in high-traffic student locations and/or involved frequent interaction with students as a primary component of the job (Table 1). I define these 'significant interaction' jobs as 'people-

work” since the focus was on their interactions with people (Mann 2004, Brotheridge and Grandy 2002).

‘Significant’ interaction jobs include ones in food service, the library, and athletics. The student worker in the athletics department worked closely enough with students to consider many to be friends outside of work. In the case of those working in food service and the library, the student workers, usually laughing and mentioning awkwardness, formed perceptions of individual students and/or the student body based on their interactions with them during the shift. Of all of the student job types, these significant interaction jobs most closely align with jobs in the service industry, which are defined by their social relational characteristics (Vallas, Finlay, and Wharton 2009). Students in these jobs often take on a role in which they are serving a “client”, creating a conscious barrier between the worker and the client, even though that client might be a fellow student. This conflict between roles of server and student may account for the awkwardness they feel while on the job (Leidner 1993, Hochschild 1983, Paules 1991, Vallas, Finlay, and Wharton 2009). In some cases these perceptions extended beyond their job to their relationships with the people in their daily life. Sarah, a food service worker, describes,

I was always brought up with please and thank you, but a lot of people here are just like ‘peas’. That just really bugged me. It changed my perception of the student body because it would really affect me when people wouldn’t be polite. If sometimes they would say thank you and sometimes they wouldn’t, I would be like ‘Oh, I wonder how they’re feeling, they didn’t say please, maybe they are having a busy day or something’. If my first interaction with them was behind the counter, and then I meet them somewhere else, I just automatically go [sad voice]

‘oh they don’t say thank you, they’re rude in line’. I guess it was just a preconception that I had already made of them.

Though students had both positive and negative experiences, those with ‘significant’ interactions with the student body felt their interactions shaped how they viewed students in life outside their job, indicating that their job played an important role in their daily student lives. Studies on work have shown that a person’s job shapes them in many ways and in many parts of their lives including values, perceptions, and friendships (Lamont 1992, Vallas, Finlay, and Wharton 2009). Though these student jobs are temporary and might not have the same degree of effect as a longer-term career, these findings highlight that student employment extends beyond the shift, impacting students’ daily lives. Future studies linking student integration and student employment could benefit from these sociology of work insights.

“It’s Actually a Really Nice Break”: Significance of Job in Daily Life

In addition to their interactions with the student body, I asked students to describe their job in the context of their daily life and how it related to their academic and social lives. Many liked that their job was separate from their academic lives, giving them time to take a break and focus on something other than their classes, even if “taking a break” sometimes meant doing homework.

Effect on Academic Life. The majority of students (82%) felt their job had either a positive or neutral effect on their academic lives (Table 1). All of them defined their academic lives as the ability to do homework. I define ‘positive’ effects as the ability to do homework on the job, and ‘neutral’ effects as enjoying their job tasks despite being unable to do homework. Megan, a non-academic office assistant notes, “Unlike a lot of

jobs, you don't get to do homework or do exhaustive work, but I feel like I have learned a great deal especially working in an office environment." Julia, a non-academic office assistant says, "Increasingly I realize just how much I have benefited from it intellectually as well as the things I get to do like certain office tasks that may be useful later on." Their statements echo sentiments expressed by several students, mainly those working in academic and non-academic office environments. Their work gave them a chance to work with intelligent, more experienced professionals in fields that they either had interest in or appreciated the intellectual challenge, as was the case of one worker who proofread academic journal articles.

While some office assistants and academic department workers cited lack of time or distractions to their academic work, by far the most dramatic negative effects were reported by students working in the food service. These food service workers specifically mentioned dinner shifts, which cut into their normal study time. One food service worker, Erin, explains the interaction between the job's effects on her academic and social lives,

The job itself was an actual job. You know a lot of office assistant jobs or student work-study jobs are the kind that you get paid to sit somewhere and do your homework. It definitely wasn't that and I mean I could have used extra homework time especially when you're a first year and you're trying to make friends and you're afraid to spend too much time doing homework in one long period in case you'll miss something that your friends are doing.

These complaints made by Erin and other food service workers are consistent with the negative effects of combining employment and university life cited by Broadbridge and Swanson (2008). Participants in their study expressed that work put a strain on their academic lives, taking time away from homework and classes. However, Broadbridge and Swanson focused on primarily real-world off-campus jobs that students did while in

school. This leads to another comparison between the food service sector of student employment and the general service sector. Other student employment jobs fall outside of this comparison because they offer students the time and encouragement to study while on the job.

Effect on Social Life. Many students (76%) felt their jobs had either positive or neutral effect on their social life. Students generally felt comfortable enough to take time to chat with friends and coworkers while working. As Mark, a non-academic office assistant describes,

We like it when our shifts overlap because it makes the time pass quicker and you can turn around and be like, 'Hey, how's it going', 'how's your day been' and that kind of thing. We would talk about fun stuff we would do over the weekend or school or stuff that has been stressing us out. I would say I'm pretty good friends with both of my coworkers.

These findings are consistent with sociology of work literature showing how workers rely on meaningful interaction with co-workers in order to make work a positive social experience (Kahn 1972).

The majority of those who felt it had a negative effect on their social lives complained that their shift overlapped with a mealtime, a key time for socialization. Food service workers were most affected as their shifts always overlapped with meals, but some other individuals had this problem as well. Elizabeth, a food service worker, explains, "It would make hanging out with people a lot harder. It definitely took away from those things [academic and social lives]. Meals were a social time and I couldn't have that when I was working." This problem of time-boundedness, or having a shift be

culturally bound to happen at a specific time such as a mealtime, is common among many service industry jobs (Hodson and Sullivan 2002).

When discussing the effects on their social lives, students solely mentioned direct effects such as increased or decreased opportunity to socialize with friends, opportunity for social advancement, and opportunities to meet new people. None of the participants mentioned any indirect benefits such as using the money they make from the job to fund their social lives outside of the job. When assessing students' perceptions of their employment, Broadbridge and Swanson found that several respondents brought up these indirect benefits, emphasizing their job as a financial outlet to social enjoyment (2006). These benefits might be still be important to the students, but the nature of the interview schedule with questions focused primarily on the job setting may have limited student responses in this regard.

Job Responsibility. In order to assess student's perceived responsibility and feelings of necessity to the functioning of their workspace, I asked students several questions about the frequency that they missed shifts, their reasons for doing so, and their feelings towards missing a shift in comparison to missing a class. I use these questions because worker absenteeism is an identified marker of low job satisfaction and low importance assigned to the job (Hodson and Sullivan 2002). The majority (71%) found their jobs to be necessary, but not critical. These students felt that the work they did had purpose and a value to others working in the setting. Often they characterized their work as helpful grunt work that allowed those in higher positions (typically non-students) to focus on the more important work and not be impeded by simple office tasks. I distinguish this category from 'critical' because students usually felt comfortable missing

work if they had a health or academic related reason and lacked strong feelings of guilt.

As Mark, a non-academic office assistant, describes,

I guess we weren't doing very important work but it was work that had to be done and my boss was always really appreciative. We weren't there they would have to do the filing themselves and it would take away from their actual job. So I feel like we were really important, not in the sense that what we did was integral to the running of the office, but it helped them do their job better.

Of the remainder of those interviewed, 12% felt their jobs were unnecessary, typically viewing their jobs as being created simply to give students a paycheck. Often they could use the majority of their time to do homework. Of the 18% who found their job to be critical to the functioning of their work place, all worked in the food service sector. While students may gain positive benefits in the form of a feeling of purpose and belonging to their work, these students often felt obligation and responsibility to their co-workers because they knew that missing a shift placed a significant burden on those working. As Erin, a food service worker, describes,

You actually have to do work. I feel like a lot of work-study jobs are the school looking for ways to give you money. They create positions; they put a desk somewhere so someone can sit at it, and say this is a job. It's possible for [the cafeteria] to run without students working, but if you didn't do your job there was a very immediate effect on the way the cafeteria was running and people would get more irritable and the whole place would just be brought down immensely for everyone. You get stressed out because you feel like you can't do your job or you haven't been doing your job. Missing work, I knew other people were depending on me to show up because if someone didn't show up and you were short, it just made everyone else's work experience so much worse.

Elizabeth, another food service worker, compares missing a class with missing a shift,

They felt just as important but for different reasons. Class was something you needed to learn but you could make it up and you still want to be there, but work it's like someone else's job will be harder. So it's like two different kinds of stress, and they were both important to me.

The similarity of the accounts of all food service workers indicates that the job components of the food service sector make it unique from other job types because it was the only type where their work suffered severely when understaffed. This element caused job-related guilt, responsibility to co-workers, and stress among food service workers that was not felt by the other students interviewed. Leidner's study of McDonald's workers shows a similar finding; Workers saw work as a team effort and did not want to be seen by their peers as making extra work for other people and not doing their share (1993). Here again, the food service sector stands out as a unique case and an exception to other job types, straddling the line between student employment and general service work.

Gaining the Inside Scoop: Perceived Value of Job

I asked students if and why they valued their job. The majority of their responses fit into the categories listed in Table 1, with a better understanding of the physical space and the social aspects mentioned most frequently (65%). Many student jobs involved in-depth work in one or multiple key spaces on campus including the campus center, the cafeteria, the library, academic buildings, and student resource buildings. Students enjoy having insider knowledge of the space and find it helpful in other aspects of their student lives. As Julia, a non-academic office assistant describes,

If I hadn't worked there, I wouldn't have really known what [the office] does. I feel like I mostly learned specific knowledge about what they offer and how they are organized. I feel like I got a behind the scenes look at what goes on and I feel comfortable if I ever wanted to do something through them.

In addition to the social aspects mentioned in the previous sections, several students discussed the opportunity to interact with upperclassman as a benefit of their job. As Diana, a campus center worker, describes,

I had a really good relationship with her [upperclassman co-worker] and talked to her a lot about things not related to work, like her study abroad experience and picking a major. I was in an economics class and she was a major, and I really found it helpful as a first year.

Students also seemed to appreciate that their jobs were set within the larger school community. It made them feel closer to the school as well as to the student body. 53% of students mentioned they valued that their job was connected to the specific educational institution, indicating that they gained a better understanding of the school, either the people, the school operations, or the school events. Mark, a non-academic office assistant, explains,

I mean people would come in with problems and I guess it was just sort of a grounding experience, you know? That not everyone at [institution name] is happy all of the time and not everyone is doing school work all the time and sometimes there are other things that go down and they're people too and they have family members that are just as horrible as everyone else. So it made me feel closer to [institution name] and learn a little bit more about other students.

The relative importance of various job aspects best captures the distinction between student-employment jobs and jobs unaffiliated with the college. In comparable jobs unconnected to an educational institution, common job values include (1) intrinsic or self-actualization values such as independence, meaningful work, use of abilities, achievement, and influence in the organization, (2) extrinsic or security/material values such as good salary and work conditions, job security, and benefits, and (3) social or relational values such as contact with people, relationships with co-workers and supervisors, and contributing to society (Ross, Schwartz, and Surkiss 1999, Knoop 1994, Hodson and Sullivan 2002).

However, when examining student-employment jobs, aside from the shared social values, you find that students are more likely to value connections to the school (connection to physical space and greater understanding of the school) or things that aid their student lives (skill set, break from academic work, and time to do homework). This is not surprising given the educational context of the job and the fact that all of the students interviewed saw themselves as students first and employees second. Students also considered their jobs to be temporary, though occasionally they felt that the skills they learned might be useful in their future careers. However, in order to make a better comparison, there needs to be more research on students who work in jobs completely unconnected to the institution.

“At Least I Didn’t Have to Work in [the Cafeteria]”: Importance of Job Type

Thus far I have discussed my findings on student employment as a whole, mentioning the break down by job type when particularly relevant or noteworthy. As

previously discussed, students in food service jobs appeared to be the most negatively affected by their jobs, often mentioning negative effects on their academic lives (67%) and social lives (100%), greater necessity of their jobs (100% critical), more job responsibility to fellow workers, more significant interactions with the student body (100%), and more socially oriented favorite parts. 100% of food workers mentioned social-related favorite parts and 0% mentioned task-related ones. Further, when discussing why they valued the job, food service was the only job sector in which none of the workers mentioned time to do homework or the opportunity to acquire a skill-set.

In large part, food service was the only job sector where students employed coping strategies to deal with their jobs. Some relied on their social interactions with co-workers to get them through the shift. As Erin explains, "It was kind of a situation where we had to talk to other people or else we would go crazy." Elizabeth, another food service worker, talked about inventing ways to entertain herself while working, often singing or initiating conversations with other students she may or may not know. These findings are consistent with the sociology of work literature on coping strategies in service industries. Service workers often disengage from their work by separating their work self from their real self. They employ humor and exaggeration to maintain a sense of self while working in routine jobs (Vallas, Finlay, and Wharton 2009). Workers also rely on regular positive contact with their coworkers as a way of maintaining dignity and a sense of self (Hodson 2001). Unlike other jobs, the food service was a highly visible, people oriented job and it did not allow students any downtime for other activities like homework. It also created job stress for students who missed a shift because students knew how hard their co-workers had to work to compensate for an understaffed shift.

I should note that although food service employees needed to employ coping strategies to deal with the job tasks, many did not need to employ coping strategies for the emotional labor of the job in the same way you might find in a non-student service job (Mann 2004). Student food service jobs fit into the category of ‘people-work’ or occupations that focus on their interactions with other people (Mann 2004, Brotheridge and Grandy 2002). Much of the research done in this field focuses on the emotional labor required of service workers as part of their job. They must appear happy and pleasing or neutral or whatever other emotion is relevant to their job type (Leidner 1993, Hochschild 1983). Though one would expect to see this in student service jobs, I found this not to be the case. When specifically asked about customer service, students felt there was no pressure from their employer to perform “good” customer service. I hypothesize that this lack of pressure stems from the inherent job security of student employment. Students and employers alike treat jobs as an assumed right, and rarely do students face the risk of being fired or having competition for their job.

Despite the minimal degree of emotional labor, as seen in many service industry jobs, students experienced some degree of need to deference themselves from their clients as a way of maintaining self-respect and distancing oneself from the role of server (Watson 1995). There is an expectation inherent in the nature of service work that the worker will be at some level deferential and accommodating to the customers (Paules 1991). For example this deference is witnessed in the practice of wearing a uniform. It should be noted food service and campus center employees were the only job types represented that required a uniform. However, since their clients were often classmates and friends, workers would often struggle to maintain dual roles of server and peer. As

Watson describes, "Every service industry has its own type of "awkward customer" and develops strategies to deal with them" (1995:310). As Elizabeth describes,

You want it to be like any other time when you would just run into each other, but there is always that point in the conversation when it's like 'oh hey, I know you, how was the test, also by the way could you please give me some spaghetti' and it's just like 'oh yea, I'm not your friend right now, I'm working for you.' I never really had a huge problem with it but I can see that it's weird because it feels like you're working for your friends but not really. No one ever really treats you like the help or something because you are a student just like them.

Other students not working in food service frequently mentioned the job sector as well, often in terms of relief that they didn't work there and sympathy for those who did. Jake, an academic department worker, explains, "A bunch of departmental jobs, you just don't do anything and you're like why am I getting paid to do nothing. But then there are jobs like [school cafeteria] which definitely seemed a lot more intense. Like I felt bad." Comments like these indicate fellow students are aware of the discrepancy in job type, with food service work being in a category of its own, viewed as worse than all other jobs.

Aside from the food service sector, the variation in the job characteristics listed in Table 1 between the other job types was minimal unless already mentioned. However there was some variation in job retention and overall job satisfaction between job types (Table 2, Appendix A). Of all students, 6 students (35%), including all three who worked in the food service sector, did not stay in the job they were originally assigned. The primary reasons for switching jobs were the opportunity to be involved in a department,

either as an office assistant, preceptor, or research aide, and the opportunity to have more time to do homework on the job. These findings are meaningful to universities aiming to increase student integration; They indicate what job aspects students value and how universities could aim to incorporate more of these job aspects in all types of student employment and not just certain sectors.

In general, retention rates corresponded with overall job satisfaction, with students who changed jobs having lower job satisfaction (Table 2, Appendix A). However I found several exceptions, typically when students felt torn between wanting to do a job with job tasks that they enjoyed and wanting to do a job with boring job tasks but plenty of time for homework. As Margaret, a facilities worker, explains, “I don’t really like the [second] job because I don’t do anything. I mean I like that I don’t do anything. I like it because it allows me to study, but as a job I don’t like it because I don’t do anything.”

Conclusion

This research demonstrates several critical findings: (1) Student workers rely on their work-study jobs as sources of social support. They gain skills and knowledge from their job that allows them to become more integrated to the college, both socially and physically. (2) These findings are common across all job types, indicating that the nature of on-campus student employment, with its limited hours and school setting, make it a possibly more integrative experience than comparable off-campus jobs, (3) Despite social and integrative benefits, higher levels of job-related stress and reliance on coping strategies characterize the food-service sector. (4) Related sociology of work literature on

service industry jobs can be applied to food service student jobs in order to increase understanding and highlight the reasons for its negative characteristics.

The first finding is particularly noteworthy because student employment has been largely ignored in the literature as a source of social support and integration. I find that it acts as both a unique space for support (students enjoy the social experience they have at work and have the opportunity to meet and interact with people they might not meet elsewhere) and as a reinforcing space of social interaction (students develop closer relationships with people they meet in other spheres). Additionally, previous literature on other spaces for integration, i.e. residential, academic, and extracurricular, focuses on the social integration benefits (interacting with peers and faculty), but rarely mentions the physical space integration benefits (Christie and Dinham 1991; Carini, Kuh, and Klein 2006; Jacobs and Archie 2007; Lanasa, Olsen, and Alleman 2007). Since participants most valued the introduction to the physical space and a greater connection to the school, this could indicate student employment is providing students with opportunities and benefits not found in other areas.

Second, I found evidence of social support and integration across all of the job types present in the study. This combined with the aspects valued by students (understanding of physical space, social aspects, and greater connection to the school) and the importance students placed on having their job set within the school environment indicate on-campus student employment provides a different experience than comparable off-campus student employment, though more research is needed to make this claim.

Third, I observed disparities in the work experience, notably between the food service sector and all other sectors. As a service-oriented job that basically required doing

work the entirety of the shift, food service workers experienced negative effects on academic and social lives, low job retention, lower job satisfaction, higher stress levels, and necessity of coping strategies. Many of the experiences noted by food service workers are common across related jobs in the service industry. Workers are put in a role of deference, challenging them to both serve the client and maintain their role as a student. This conflict in roles presents food service employees with a far greater challenge than other job types because it affects their primary role as a student, both in their required interactions and in the job tasks and effects on academic and social lives.

Though these findings are noteworthy, the study is limited by its failure to include comparison groups of students working in off-campus jobs and students with no form of employment. Without this comparison, it is difficult to fully assess whether the benefits of student employment account for more successful integration among work-study workers compared to other students. It is possible that those not employed in work-study jobs are better integrated, despite the perceived benefits of student employment. Further, the interview schedule focused primarily on social support in the work environment. It needed more questions about student's feelings to their entire college life and experience in order to better assess the degree of social integration. As noted earlier, the small sample size limits the ability to make generalizations from these findings, and specifically in terms of job type, I was only able to interview students from one service sector job, food service. Given its distinction from other job types, it would be important to see whether the findings on the food service sector are true for other service sector student jobs. Additionally, this paper does not specifically address issues of gender, class, race, and ethnicity, which have been central to much of the literature on the service

industry. Though participants did not reference any of these issues in their responses, future studies could explore how these factors present themselves in student employment, particularly in a comparison study to students that are not employed.

Based on these findings and limitations, I offer several suggestions for future research: First, research could compare on-campus workers, off-campus workers, and non-workers in terms of support and integration in order to assess whether the benefits received by on-campus student workers give them advantages over other students. Second, in terms of assessing the social benefits of the job, students primarily discussed the direct benefits such as how the work environment served as a social space but none brought up indirect benefits such as using the money they earn from the job to engage in social activities. Future research could address these indirect benefits, again in the form of a comparative study between students with and without work-study jobs. Additionally, more research should be done on the coping strategies of food service employees and possibly other service sector workers, examining how they navigate the contrasting roles of student and service worker.

Overall, these findings suggest that colleges and universities should increase their focus on student employment. With this knowledge of the social and integrative benefits of student employment, higher education institutions can advertise these benefits and encourage participation in work-study by eligible students who currently fail to take advantage of the program. Further, colleges could redesign student employment training to create employment orientation groups that would serve a similar function as freshmen orientation groups, encouraging a mentor relationship with upper classmen workers, increased worker interaction, and transfer of knowledge. This would allow students to

develop more meaningful relationships with their co-workers and supervisors and perhaps reduce the job-related stress, particularly in sectors with large numbers of workers such as the food service sector. Orientation groups could also act as support groups for those in more stressful jobs, providing a forum for upperclassmen workers to offer insights and job tips. The added role of mentor for any student job would also diversify the job tasks, a benefit for those unsatisfied by the tasks of their assigned employment.

With this research, institutions also gain a more complete understanding of the student integration experience, allowing them to better pinpoint institutional shortcomings that decrease retention rates. Finally, the case of the food service sector indicates that higher education institutions need to pay more attention to the variation within work-study jobs in order to provide students with the best possible chance of successful integration and retention.

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Appendix A

Interview Schedule:

1. Tell me about the best job you have ever had.
2. What were your favorite parts about the job you worked last year?
3. If they still work there, why did they decide to work there again, if not, why not?
4. Describe a typical shift, what did you do, what kind of people did you work with, etc.
5. Did you have any expectations of the job before starting work there?
6. When you were having a bad day at work or something bothered you while working, how did you deal with it?
7. Did you ever meet up or hang out with people you worked with outside of work?
8. What have you learned while working in your job that you think the typical student doesn't know? What advice would you give to a non-working student about your workplace?
9. What were your least favorite parts about the job?
10. Describe your interactions with non-student workers while you were working.
11. When your shift was over did you stop being an X (whatever their job was)?
12. How did you meet the majority of your friends you have now?
13. How did you describe your job to your friends? Did you ever tell work stories? Can you give an example?
12. Did you ever interact with friends while you were working? Can you give an example of when you did?
13. How did you feel when you were in your work environment but not working a shift?
14. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rank your overall job satisfaction?
15. What do you see as the role of student workers at your job? How do other people connected to your job view the role of the student worker?
16. If they have thus far indicated it was a supportive environment, what aspects of the job made it a supportive environment?
17. What skills do you feel you gained from this job?
18. How does your job fit into the context of your broader student life, i.e. academic life, social life, etc?
19. How many hours per week did you work?
20. How would you compare your feelings towards missing a class and missing a shift?
21. What did you do in the event they would not be able to show up for work?
22. Did you value having the job, if so why or what aspects?
23. How would you compare this job to other jobs you may have had?
24. What are the characteristics of an ideal student job?

Table 1: Percentage Distributions of Student Workers' Descriptions of Job Attributes

	%*
Job Characteristics	
Important Job Characteristics (Real Job)	
Task-Related.....	59
Social-Related.....	71
Important Job Characteristics (Ideal Job)	
Task-Related.....	100
Social-Related.....	35
Negative Job Characteristics	
Task-Related.....	82
Social-Related.....	29
Social Interactions	
Interactions with Student Workers	
Negative.....	0
Work Only.....	29
Acquaintance.....	53
Enhanced Relationship.....	18
Friend.....	29
Interactions with Supervisors	
Unsupportive.....	12
Supportive.....	88
Interactions with Student Body	
None/Minimal.....	35
Moderate.....	35
Significant.....	29
Significance of Job in Daily Life	
Continuation of Job beyond Shift	
No continuation.....	53
Thought about job.....	29
Actually performed job.....	18
Effect on Academic Life	
Negative.....	18
Positive.....	47
Neutral.....	35
Effect on Social Life	
Negative.....	24
Positive.....	41
Neutral.....	35
Necessity of Student Workers	
Unnecessary.....	12
Necessary.....	71
Critical.....	18
Perceived Value and Satisfaction with Job	
Better understanding of physical place(s).....	65
Social aspects of job.....	65

Better understanding/connection to the school.....	53
Monetary reason.....	53
Sense of accomplishment.....	53
Skill set.....	47
Break from academic life.....	35
Time to do homework.....	29
Job Satisfaction.....	8.1

*Percentages will not add to 100 in cases where responses are not mutually exclusive.

Table 2: Retention and Satisfaction by Job Type

	Retention(%)	Mean Satisfaction(1-10)	Total (N)
All Jobs	65	7.9	17
Job Type			
Food Service	0	6.7	3
Office Assis. (Non-Academic)	33	6.5	3
Facilities	50	8.0	2
Academic Department	100	8.6	4
Athletics	100	8.5	1
Library	100	9.0	1
Campus Center	100	8.0	2
Off-Campus	100	10.0	1