



Richard Bland College

of WILLIAM & MARY

A Review of Student Employment at RBC: Findings and Recommendations

By Dr. Tiffany Birdsong, Provost's Fellow, Summer 2019

Purpose of Study

In keeping with its strategic priorities, namely providing an Exceptional Student Experience (ESE@RBC), Richard Bland College continues to pursue innovative ways to increase student retention and persistence. In keeping with these efforts, in the Summer of 2019 a special project was initiated to assess the current student employment program (Work Study) at RBC relative to ESE@RBC goals, and to explore areas for improvement based on current trends and best practices. The purpose of this report is to provide a brief overview of the results of this initiative. It is designed to offer a description of the current student employment program at RBC, provide a rationale for the role of student employment as a tool for improving retention and persistence, review national best practices for student personnel, and offer suggestions for enhancing the student employment program at RBC in the future.

1. Review of Student Employment: 2017-19

1.1 Background

- RBC employs students via Federal Work Study (FWS) and Institutional Work Study (IWS), with the majority of students employed through IWS funds.
- In 2017-19 students were employed across campus in a variety of departments, including but not limited to Athletics, Communications/Marketing, Dining Services, Enrollment Services, Facilities, Financial Aid, Human Resources, IT Services, Library, Records and Registration, and Student Success.
- RBC saw an estimated 34% increase in the number of students employed on-campus from 2017 to 2019.

1.2 SWOT analysis

- *Strengths:* Growth in number of students participating in on-campus employment and increased diversity in the departments utilizing student workers.
- *Weaknesses:* Lack of consistency across departments in processes for hiring and supervising student workers, and in communication and clarity about available positions and how departments go about hiring IWS student personnel.
- *Opportunities:* Encouraging and incentivizing additional departments to appropriately utilize student workers; incorporating career-readiness skill building; enhancing the role of the supervisor; campus engagement events that are specifically geared toward student personnel.
- *Threats:* Program oversight, institutional support, and supervisor buy-in will be essential for an effective student employment program to thrive.

2. Student Employment as a Tool for Increased Engagement, Retention and Persistence

2.1 Review of relevant research findings

- Research indicates that on-campus employment can be a tool for improving students' financial security, while also simultaneously improving learning, career-readiness and persistence.
- Phipps and Merisotis (2003) found that for low-income students in particular, work-study was positively associated with higher grade point average and greater engagement in campus activities, which in turn impacted persistence.
- Working alongside a cohort of peers and/or other professionals who directly contribute to the mission and success of an institution can help build a student's sense of identity, connection, and value to the campus (McCormick, Moore, & Kuh, 2010).
- In 2018 Old Dominion University's on-campus work program for freshman and sophomores, Learn and Earn Advantage Program (LEAP), recorded an overall fall-to-fall retention rate of 98 percent.
- While on-campus employment opportunities can considerably enhance the student experience in multiple ways, it is essential that they are intentionally designed around learning and engagement (McClellan, Creager, & Savoca, 2018).

2.2 Highlights from NASPA's Comprehensive Examination of On-campus Student Employment

Activities within a highly impactful student employment program may include:

- Establishment of foundational requirements or criteria to ensure preparedness and clarity regarding student and employer goals and expectations.
- Cultivation of a supportive student-supervisor relationship in which the supervisor provides guidance and constructive feedback.
- Frequent opportunities for student articulation of learning and reflection on the connections between the student's experience, their coursework, and long-term career goals.
- Engagement in both planned and authentic programming that allows for application of classroom learning, exploration of professional skills, and the development of relevant learning outcomes.
- Acknowledgment and documentation of student growth, contributions, and commitment during and after the experience.

2.3 National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) career-readiness competencies

- critical thinking and problem solving
- oral and written communication
- teamwork and collaboration
- digital technology
- leadership
- professionalism and work ethic
- career management
- global and intercultural fluency

3. Next Steps for Student Employment at RBC

3.1 Specifically target the highly impactful student activities identified by NACE, for example:

1. *Foundational requirements and criteria*
 - a. Mission and vision for student worker program
 - b. Clear job descriptions from all supervisors
2. *Cultivation and enhancement of supportive and productive student–supervisor relationships*
 - a. Resources and training for supervisors for optimal engagement with student personnel
3. *Connections between the students’ experience, their coursework, and long-term career goals*
 - a. Collaboration with Career Services, Learner Mentors, ESE workshops
4. *Planned and authentic programming*
 - a. Speaker Series with local companies/employers; Relevant ESE 101 Workshops; Dress for Success event; Internship Fair
5. *Development of relevant learning outcomes*
 - a. Base learning outcomes on National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) career readiness competencies (see section 2.3)
6. *Documentation*
 - a. Evaluations: Supervisor evaluations, student self-evaluations, and student evaluations of supervisor(s).
 - b. Collection of Learning Outcomes data
 - c. Collaboration with Department of Institutional Research to track retention, GPA, persistence, and student engagement within the student worker program.

3.2 Continue to be mindful of the five takeaways from NACE’s Comprehensive Examination of On-Campus Student Employment:

1. Senior leadership engagement is critical.
2. Multiple communication channels are needed to explain to students the benefits of working on campus and to inform them of available positions.
3. Supervisors are the linchpin of the student employee experience.
4. Institutions should have a shared understanding of what student employees should be and are actually learning.
5. Data usage for the purposes of analyzing and sharing the impact of student employment is an area for improvement among many institutions.

4. References

Burnside, O., Wesley, A., Wesaw, A., Parnell, A. (2019). *Employing Student Success: A Comprehensive Examination of On-Campus Student Employment*. Washington, D.C.: NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

McClellan, G.S., Creager, K., & Svoca, M. (2018). *A good job: Campus employment as a high-impact practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

McCormick, A.C., Moore, J.V., III, & Kuh, G.D. (2010). Working during college: Its relationship to student engagement and educational outcomes. In L.W. Perna (Ed.), *Understanding the working college student: New research and its implications for policy and practice* (pp. 179-212). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Phipps, R. A., & Merisotis, J. P. (2003). *Protecting access and affordability: New opportunities for Massachusetts public higher education in times of rising student charges*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Saunders, K.P., & Schuh, J.H. (2004). The Influence of Financial Aid on the Persistence of Students from Low-Socioeconomic Backgrounds. In Duranczyk, I. M., Higbee, J.L., Lundell, D.B. (Eds.), *Best Practices for Access and Retention in Higher Education* (pp.93-101). Minneapolis, MN: Center for Research on Developmental Education and Urban Literacy, General College, University of Minnesota.