1-1-2016

Impact of Employment on Undergraduate Academic Achievement

Canaan Daniels
Eastern Illinois University
This research is a product of the graduate program in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University.
Find out more about the program.

Recommended Citation
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Impact of Employment on Undergraduate Academic Achievement

Canaan Daniels

Eastern Illinois University
Abstract

The purpose of the research was to examine the relationship between employment and academics among undergraduate students attending a mid-sized Midwestern institution. Though current literature was mixed on this relationship, the researcher developed research questions to further explore if such variables were related. From data presented by prior research on employment and academics, hypotheses were formed to see if employment had any relationship to students' academic achievement. A questionnaire was then distributed to over 8,000 students so that results from participants could be examined to find if any relationships existed. An SPSS analysis using 421 responses was conducted that resulted in the null hypotheses being retained, meaning there was no significant relationships between employment and undergraduate academic achievement. While data yielded insignificant results, recommendations have been made that could be used to more effectively explore the balancing act of academics and employment.
DEDICATION

Throughout the past two years, I would not have been able to have finished my
graduate program if it were not with the support and guidance from my parents. They
have always encouraged me, even in times of doubt. I would also like to thank my
graduate assistant supervisor, Ceci Brinker, for giving me the chance to move closer to
my goal of being a professional working in student life and challenging me to grow as an
advisor. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Dianne Timm, for providing me with an
opportunity to travel abroad. It was through her guidance that I can now call myself a
global citizen. It is with all of their help through this process, that I dedicate my finished
product.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It would not have been possible to complete my study without the guidance of my thesis Advisor, Dr. Richard Roberts. Dr. Roberts has continually pushed my limits not only as a writer, but as a researcher and I would like to thank him for challenging me to grow as a student affairs professional. I would also like to thank my thesis committee members, Dr. Catherine Polydore and Dr. Kesha Coker, for being patient with my study even in times I lacked motivation. It is with your guidance that I have been able to stay on track.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The impact of college student employment has been a primary focus of higher education research for some time. As early as 1940, the University of New Hampshire was surveying undergraduate students regarding the level of influence their employment had on academics (Alexander & Woodruff, 1940). In 1953, Indiana University researchers studied their students' balance of work and academics (Trueblood, 1957). Student employment has been an increasing commonality among colleges, with minimal signs of ever decreasing in magnitude. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported (2009) that the number of students employed in the United States has grown from around 850,000 in 1960 to well over 3.9 million as of 2009. In 2012, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) released information regarding the number of college students that were employed in 2012. The NCES survey indicated that 72% of part-time students were employed, while around 41% of full-time students were employed (NCES, 2012). Based on these statistics, it is essential for student affairs professionals to understand the impact of employment on students.

While much is known about the number of employed students at higher education institutions, little is known about how one's employment directly impacts the level of academic achievement. Quantitative studies have been conducted outside of the United States seeking to find a correlation between employment and academic achievement (Barron & Anastasiadou, 2009; Beerkens & Lill, 2011; Holmes, 2008). With less research conducted on the employment of students within the United States, it is worth examining. Looking at a medium sized institution in the Midwest, little is known about the employed student population. For the research pertaining to the current study, few
look at small institutions, while many looked at either institutions with well over 20,000 students, or used a large pool of participants from a variety of institutions (Motte & Schwartz, 2009). With an enrollment surpassing 8,000, it is difficult to have any valid understanding of the magnitude or impact of student employment without research. In conducting this study, it was the researcher's intent that for the first time that students employed while attending this institution can be examined to provide insight on the impact of employment on academic success at this specific location.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the nature of academic performance and employment among currently employed students that attend a mid-sized Midwestern institution. Specifically, the study was designed to see if there is a correlation between the number of hours a student works each week and the involvement one puts into academics as measured by GPA and hours devoted to coursework. Through a quantitative study, the researcher gained information from these students to obtain sufficient data to further examine the research questions.

Research Questions

The study was constructed to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What is the nature of the relationship between hours worked and academic performance among college students?

RQ2: What is the relationship between hours worked and hours spent studying?

RQ3: At what number of hours worked per week does employment begin to negatively impact academic performance?
RQ4: Is there a difference in academic achievement between students who work off-campus and those who work on-campus?

**Alternative Hypothesis**

The researcher’s hypotheses are as follows:

$H_a 1$: A negative correlation exists between hours worked and academic performance among college students (Torres, Gross, and Dadashova, 2010).

$H_a 2$: There will be a negative relationship between hours worked and hours spent studying.

$H_a 3$: Students’ GPAs will begin to drop after 16-20 hours of work (Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2008; Kosi, Nastav, & Šušteršič, 2013; Salamonson & Andrew, 2006).

$H_a 4$: Place of employment has little effect on academic achievement as measured by GPA (Lang, 2012; Wenz & Yu, 2010).

**Null Hypothesis**

The researcher’s null hypotheses are as follows:

$H_0 1$: There is no correlation between hours worked and academic performance among college students.

$H_0 2$: There is no relationship between hours worked and hours spent studying.

$H_0 3$: There is no threshold between hours worked and GPA.

$H_0 4$: There is no relationship between place of employment and GPA.

**Significance of the Study**

As students’ monetary contribution to financing college education increased each year, they have sought various means to fund their education (Institute for College Access & Success, 2014). One such mean is to work, so students are now faced with
having to find more time to balance their course load, employment, and social life. In respect to the college experience, learning how to balance academics and employment can be a difficult task (Lowe & Gayle, 2007).

This study would help student affairs professionals gain a better understanding of the relationship between academics and employment among students. Professors would also be able to see if the range of student employment correlates with class engagement and academic success as measured by GPA. This study will open discussions about what can be done to help those who are employed not only be educated about balancing academics and work, but what can be done to create coursework that relates to one’s employment; a major component of the college experience:

**Limitations of the Study**

The study was conducted at a medium-sized institution of higher education in the Midwest. The study focused entirely upon the results from a sample population at this institution. Information gathered only reflects this population, and does not replicate employed students populations at other institutions of higher education.

Further, as a limitation of self-reporting research, the quantitative design of the survey administered has the possibility of generating participant bias, meaning that those who participated might not have been as honest with their answers. With answering questions related to academic achievement, the possibility of participants seeking to provide results higher than their actual academic achievements is a possible outcome (Presser & Stinson, 1998).
Definitions of Terms

The following term(s) are used throughout the research that at times, are abbreviated:

**Academic achievement.** When “…students achieve satisfactory or superior levels of academic performance as they progress through and complete their college experience (Cuseo, 2007).”

**Grade point average (GPA).** “The average obtained by dividing the total number of grade points earned by the total number of credits attempted (Grade point average-definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.).” GPA’s obtained from participants in this study were based on a 4.0 scale.

**Undergraduate full-time student.** “A student enrolled for 12 or more semester credits, or 12 or more quarter credits, or 24 or more contact hours a week each term (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).”

**Undergraduate part-time student.** “A student enrolled for either less than 12 semester or quarter credits, or less than 24 contact hours a week each term. Graduate: A student enrolled for less than 9 semester or quarter credits. (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).”

Summary

Student employment while attending college is a common experience for many individuals, especially for those needing to finance education. While the number of students employed is well known on a large scale, little is known about the employment levels at specific institutions, nor its impact on one’s academic achievement. This study was designed to examine the correlation between employment and academics. From the
results gathered, inferences can be made about what impact the correlation has on students and if any steps needs to be taken to best accommodate those students.
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This chapter examines research pertaining to specific topics within the current study are examined in depth as follows: impact of employment, extraneous factors influencing academic achievement, and the theoretical framework which serves as a guide to the researcher’s study.

Impact of Employment

Impact on coursework. As suggested in Robotham’s 2009 and 2012 studies, there can be both positive and negative effects of combining employment and academics. To find if such effects were present, Robotham (2009) created a survey asking specific questions related to both the positive and negative outcomes that may arise from being an employed student. When asked about the positive outcomes of employment, 60% of respondents said that working while in school both improved their ability to deal with other people and improved their communication skills (Robotham, 2009). When asked about the negative outcomes from being employed as a student, 67% of participants stated that doing less work/reading for assignments and having to cut down on leisure/social activities were associated with having to work (Robotham, 2009). Robotham repeated his 2009 study in 2012 to see how being employed impacted academics differently over time, but with a much larger sample population. In the 2012 study, the researcher found that the rate of participants stating that employment had improved their ability to deal with other people had grown from 60% in 2009 to 70% in 2012 (Robotham, 2012). For improving communication skills, the rate also went up from 60% in 2009 to 69% in 2012. As for the trend of negative outcomes between 2009 and
2012, the researcher concluded that the percentages of students stating that employment led to less work/reading for assignments went down significantly from 67% of students in 2009, to only 42% in 2012 (Robotham, 2012). The study also found that the response rate of participants stating that employment led to having to cut down on leisure/social activities dropped from 67% in 2009 to 53% in 2012 (Robotham, 2012).

Looked at the effects of employment on students’ time in an international institution (Manthei and Gilmore, 2005). Unlike most research that exist on this topic, they utilized a qualitative approach by administering a questionnaire where students could write in their responses about their commitment to employment and its effect on their academic workload. Through examination of the responses from 83 students from the University of Canterbury, the researchers found many common themes among students in relation to their struggles with balancing academics and employment. The most negative response in regards to employment was that over 50% reported that being employed caused their course work to suffer and limited more time for academic study than they would like. While these students reported employment’s negative impact, over half of the students did respond that being employed while taking courses helped them “learn to organize academic work more effectively” (Manthei & Gilmore, 2005, p. 210).

While financial assistance can help further students’ pursuit of higher education, Lam (1999) found that being employed while in college can inhibit one’s progress towards completing the requirements necessary for graduation. To obtain this information, Lam examined over 4,000 students preparing to graduate from a large urban public university. Using a longitudinal study comprised of data from four different institutional data sets, Lam found that, on average, students who were employed, took
longer to complete their degrees than students that were not employed. Furthermore, compared to students who only used loans as financial assistance, employed students took a semester longer to graduate (Lam, 1999).

**Impact on grade point average (GPA).** Determining underlying factors that contribute to the positive or negative fluctuation of a student’s GPA was a main point of interest for many researchers (Dundes & Marx, 2006; Torres, Gross, & Dadashova, 2010). While there is significant research on the impact of employment on GPA, the data yielded mixed results with both positive and negative effects (Dundes & Marx, 2006; Torres, Gross, & Dadashova, 2010).

Kosi, Nastav, and Šušteršič (2013) examined the point at which a student’s level of hours worked per week begins to negatively impact academics was researched. To find out what the threshold level is for one’s GPA to drop, the researchers looked at databases from a student employment service in Slovenia in order to obtain information related to their research. When looking at the trends of hours worked versus GPA of participants, the researchers established that employment begins to negatively impact one’s academic achievement at 18 hours per week (Kosi, et al., 2013). Using 18 hours a week as the threshold has not been found in similar research, though it is worth noting that Salamonson and Andrew (2006), who studied 267 employed students from 2001 to 2002, found that a negative impact on GPA begins for those being employed for 16 or more hours per week. Also looking at when employment starts to produce negative effects on GPA, Kalenkoski and Pabilonia (2008) found that when examining students who attend four-year institutions that those who worked 20 hours or less had the highest
GPA on their campus, but those who worked over 20 hours a week reported having the lowest GPA on average.

Torres, Gross, and Dadashova (2010) also examined if a negative relationship exists between GPA and hours worked per week. Through their results they found that a significant negative impact on GPA occurs. Unlike Kosi, Nastav, and Šušteršič (2013), Torres et al. (2013) found that the negative impact started much higher than 18 hours per week. For the researchers' study, students from two urban colleges in Indiana were administered surveys, to which a total of 673 participants completed. They concluded that students under the age of 21 who worked more than 30 hours per week, saw a .43 decrease in GPA. Increasing one's hours worked per week to 40 resulted in a negative impact, as these respondents had a .60 point decrease in GPA (Torres, et al., 2010).

Others also found negative correlations between hours worked and GPA. For example, Dadgar (2012) used a population of 41,353 students who were enrolled at either a technical or community college in the state of Washington to see if such a correlation exists. Dadgar found that those who were employed had a decrease in GPA by .028 for each hour worked per week. This means that a student who worked 10 hours a week are estimated to see a .28 decrease in GPA (Dadgar, 2012). While a decrease in GPA by .028 is significant when looking at students who work many hours, similar research has found that when looking at student employment trends on a span of almost a decade that hours worked does not negatively impact one's level of academic achievement (DeSimone, 2008). DeSimone (2008) showed employment's long term impact using results from the Harvard College Alcohol Study (CAS), a nine year longitudinal study that contained information pertaining to employment and grades of students attending
full-time at a four-year institution. Looking at the results from a span of nine years, DeSimone’s results showed that for each hour worked per week, a student is expected to see a .011 decrease in their GPA. This translates into a .11 decrease for students that work 10 hours per week (DeSimone, 2008).

One study was conducted at two large southwestern universities in the United States to see if there were negative consequences associated with working while furthering one’s education (Hawkins, Smith, II, & Grant, 2005). From the 300 undergraduate social work majors that participated in the study, a significant negative correlation between hours worked and GPA was found. Multiple conclusions were drawn after examining the demographics of the results and their correlation with GPA. When looking at GPA in relation to gender, males worked more hours, and also had lower GPAs than females. The researchers also found that there was a positive relationship between increasing age and higher GPAs. In respect to race/ethnicity, no relationship was found using one’s GPA, though minorities more frequently reported that parental and family responsibilities interfered with their academics. Among other demographical questions, the researchers also found that individuals who were either married or upperclassmen were more likely to report higher GPAs (Hawkins, et. al., 2005).

Information pertaining to employment and GPA is often examined through quantitative studies, but Barke et al. (2000) used a qualitative study to allow participants to shape their perceptions of how being employed affected their academics. Using a sample of 879 full-time undergraduates from a large-sized institution, the authors found that 43% felt that being employed directly contributed to a negative impact on their own
grades (Barke et al., 2000). While little related research used a qualitative approach, it is important in conducting further research to see if perceptions of employment's impact coincide with the data students report.

Although the research yielded negative correlations between hours worked and GPA, Dundes and Marx (2006) found that certain ranges of hours worked by students yielded significantly higher GPAs than those who do not work. To gather data concerning students and employment, the researchers reached out to undergraduate students at a liberal arts college of less than 2,000 students located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Of the entire student population, surveys from 256 students were used. To further examine how hours worked affected GPA, the researchers put respondents into groups of those who work fewer than 10 hours a week, 10 to 19 hours a week, and those who work over 20 hours a week. From the results, the researchers found that working more hours did not lead to a lower GPA. Out of the three groups, those that worked between 10 to 19 hours a week not only had higher GPAs, but responded that they devoted more time to studying than the other two groups (Dundes & Marx, 2006).

Similar to Dundes and Marx's (2005) study, Stinebrickner and Stinebrickner (2003) found a positive correlation between GPA and hours worked. Unlike most studies, their study used a population from Berea College, an institution in central Kentucky that provides full-tuition scholarships on the basis that students participate in the college’s mandatory work-study program. Based on the records of all students on campus, the researchers were able to determine that for every hour worked, a student would see a .04 increase in GPA in their first semester of college, and a .02 increase after their second semester. While these results yield a positive correlation between GPA and
hours worked, the researchers noted that students who attend colleges with mandatory work-study programs are more motivated to balance academics and employment (Stinebrickner, & Stinebrickner, 2003).

Research on the impact of students being employed has primarily focused on four-year institutions, but little exists when examining its effects on a community college. While Kalenkoski and Pabilonia (2008) used a sample derived of students from four-year institutions, they also examined data from those that attended community college that were a part of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. For four-year college students, the researchers found that those who worked 20 hours or less had a higher GPA than those that were not employed. For their population that attended community college, the researchers found that students who worked, no matter how many hours, on average earned higher GPAs than students who did not report being employed (Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2008). Though this research only reflects a specific population of community college students, further research should be conducted to see if this trend is correlated to the nature of 2-year institutions or if this is just an isolated circumstance.

Research shows looking at employment's impact on GPA has produced different results. Salamonson and Andrew (2006) found that employment has a negative impact, while other researchers like Kalenkoski and Pabilonia (2008) concluded that for certain populations, such as those found in community colleges, GPAs go up. The review has examined work and GPA by looking at different populations from different institutions and provided mixed results. Therefore, continued research incorporating GPA and hours worked by students as variables is necessary to further explain the nature of this problem.
**Impact on retention.** Most research conducted on the impact of employment among college students uses hours worked and GPA as a variable to measure its influence. While this topic has widely gained attention, little has focused on employment’s impact on retention. To see if such an impact exists, Motte and Schwartz (2009) looked at how a student’s retention is influenced through employment. They chose a sample population from the Canadian based program, Youth in Transition. This program utilizes responses from individuals who are going through major transitions in their lives to further explore what major influences play a role in their lives in respect to academics and employment. By examining the hours of work per participant and their academic status at the beginning of their second year of the program, the researchers found that the more hours worked per week by the student, the higher the probability that the participant would not continue their academics (Motte & Schwartz, 2009).

**On-versus off-campus employment.** Lang (2012) published a study that aimed to look at the effect that employment had on students’ grades. Through the use of the National Survey of Student Engagement, Lang was able to examine demographic trends among employed students. One of the key demographics the researcher focused on was where the student worked. To define this demographic more thoroughly, Lang gave participants an option on the survey to select whether they were employed on campus or off campus. Through a statistical analysis, the researcher found that students who are employed on campus on average, had slightly higher grades than those that are employed off campus. Lang (2012) reported that students that work on campus report having more time to partake in co-curricular and social activities than those with off campus employment.
Wenz and Yu (2010) also examined the impact of employment on students’ academic achievement. Using a sample population of employed students from Winona State University, a public university in Minnesota, the researchers collected data via a quantitative survey to find if employment had a negative or positive impact on academics. Results showed that students that were employed on campus have on average, GPAs were .13 points lower than students employed off campus (Wenz & Yu, 2010). This research differs from Lang’s (2012) study that showed that students employed on campus have a slightly higher GPA than those employed off campus. While both studies drew different conclusions, both studies noted how small the difference lies in GPA when comparing on versus off campus employment (Lang, 2012; Wenz & Yu, 2010).

**Priority of academics.** Examining the priority of an employed student’s academics, Holmes (2008) and Tyson (2011) presented different results in their studies. Holmes (2008) created a questionnaire that would generate results examining students’ perceptions on the influence academics had on students’ choice of employment. Upon data analysis, Holmes found that only 3% of participants felt that flexible hours were not essential, while only 9% of participants also felt that it was not essential that work must fit with their study patterns (Holmes, 2008). This study offers differing conclusions than Tyson’s (2011) qualitative study, which found a common theme among participants that “students prioritize work over school, thus lowering academic achievement and extending time to degree” (p. 482).
Extraneous Factors of Academics

While the current study mainly focused on a student’s employment and how it impacts their GPA, there are many researchers that focus on extraneous factors such as an institution’s mentorship program, first-year experience program, attendance, and class size (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Durden & Ellis, 1995; Jamelske, 2009; Kokkelenberg, Dillon, & Christy, 2008). When considering employment’s impact on students’ academics, it is important to note that while direct correlations exist between GPA and hours worked, exterior factors are just as influential in predicting one’s grades. Through this section, examples of exterior factors that have impacted one’s academic achievement will be further explored.

Class size. The average class size of courses at institutions has become a major selling point from admissions offices to potential students. The reasoning behind this emphasis on the number of students in each course is based on research which shows that the more students enrolled in a class, the lower the average GPA among those in attendance (Arias & Walker, 2004; Kokkelenberg, Dillon, & Christy, 2006). To further examine if class size is an influential factor in predicting GPA, Arias and Walker (2004) surveyed a public liberal arts college with roughly 5,500 students. Using the institution’s economics courses, the researchers studied two different economics and society courses that were taught once during the fall semester and again during the spring. For each course, one section each semester was capped at 25 students while the other section was capped at 89 students. Examining the results after one year of study, the researchers found that the smaller course sections reported having higher GPAs than those enrolled in
the two sections capped at 89 students. These results show a negative correlation between increasing class size and academic achievement (Arias & Walker, 2004).

Seeking to find similar results through alternate methods, Kokkelenberg, Dillon, and Christy (2006) examined from 1994 to 2004 the results of 998,898 observations surrounding undergraduate students from a Northeastern U.S institution. From the results provided, researchers concluded that while an overall negative correlation exists between increasing class sizes and GPA, 20 students in a single class appears to be the maximum number appropriate before drastically negative consequences arise from larger numbers of class size. Further, research shows that while there is a decrease in GPA per student when looking at classes between 10 and 20 students, classes ranging from 20 to 40 students yield rapidly decreasing negative impacts on GPA. The researchers asserted this trend of negative impact becomes even more detrimental for students attending classrooms with 40 to 60 students (Kokkelenberg, Dillon, & Christy, 2006).

When examining GPA, both researches above utilized class size as a variable to test its impact on students’ GPA. Using a different approach, Johnson (2009) chose not to use GPA, but letter grades instead. By looking at students attending a research university with 2,200 undergraduate course sections, the researcher was able to determine what grades were harder to obtain when class size increases. Through examination of results, Johnson (2009) concluded that the obtainment of a letter grade of “A” is significantly harder to obtain by a student as class sizes increase. This letter grade shows a harder level of obtainment in comparison to a letter grade of “C,” as it is still harder to achieve when class sizes increase, but at a lower increase of difficulty. Seeing that the research presented all conclude negative comparisons between class size and academic
achievement, it can be predicted for the research to be conducted that similar results will be obtained through the population utilized within the current study.

**Sleep patterns.** Maintaining a sufficient amount of quality sleep has long been associated with improvement of health, but little research has been done on its impact on one’s academic performance. With the little research that has been done though, all conclude that there is a significant relationship between quality of sleep and academic achievement (Medeiros, Mendes, Lima, & Araujo, 2001; Singleton & Wolfson, 2009; Taylor, Vatthauer, Bramoweth, Ruggero, & Roane, 2013). Further examining the relationship between sleep and academic performance, Medeiros, Mendes, Lima, and Araujo (2001) looked specifically at 35 medical students. Conducting the research for two weeks, the researchers required participants to report the amount of sleep gained each night along with the test scores achieved. The researchers found a positive correlation between sleep cycle and sleep length, meaning that with increasing the quality and time of one’s sleep patterns, participants were able to more fully comprehend the learning material and tests that accompany their coursework (Medeiros, Mendes, Lima, & Araujo, 2001).

Though correlations are found between sleep and academic performance, Singleton and Wolfson (2009) sought factors that influenced the amount of sleep students obtain each night. By having a sample of 236 students from a liberal arts college, the researchers (2009) were able to measure the effect of alcohol on one’s sleep patterns while still being able to compare amount of sleep to one’s academic outcomes. Upon conclusion of the study, Singleton and Wolfson (2009) found that as alcohol intake increases, amount of quality sleep decreases. When comparing the amount of sleep
participants received to one’s GPA, decrease in hours of sleep led to a lower GPA. Thus, the researchers (2009) concluded that while the amount of sleep obtained is significantly correlated with one’s academic achievement, that the amount of alcohol consumed also plays a crucial role in predicting participant’s GPA.

To further enforce the claim that increase in sleep improves academic performance, Taylor, Vatthauer, Bramoweth, Ruggero, and Roane, (2013) studied 867 participants at a large state university in Texas who were enrolled in the institution’s psychology classes. Participants were then given a sleep diary, where they would record for seven days the time they went to bed and woke up each day. Using the data retrieved from participants, the researchers found that like similar research, increase in sleep was a significant predictor in the probability of participants having a higher GPA (Taylor, et.al, 2013).

Financial aid. While sleep and class size have been included in studies as exterior factors that influence one’s academic achievement, financial aid has not been widely incorporated into recent research. To see if financial aid does influence one’s academic achievement, Stater (2009) examined data from three different public institutions. Through examination of the amount of financial aid received and one’s GPA, Stater (2009) found that as financial aid increases, so does GPA. Thus, a positive correlation between financial aid and GPA existed upon the three institutions used throughout this study (Stater, 2009).

First year experience. Accompanying class size, sleep patterns, and financial aid as exterior factors that influence one’s academic achievement, Jamelske (2008) made a case for the participation in a first year experience program as being an influential factor
one’s GPA. Looking at a Midwestern public university, Jamelske studied both students that were a part of the program and those that were not to see if a correlation existed between participation and GPA. Examining the results of the 1,997 participants, Jamelske (2008) found that student who were a part of the program produced higher GPA’s than those that were new to the institution, but were not a part of the first year experience program. While GPA was influential, Jamelske (2008) found no correlation existed between participation and retention.

Family support. Like financial aid and first year experience programs, family support is also an extraneous factor that has gained little attention from researchers. According to Cheng, Ickes and Verhofstadt (2011), this lack of attention is primarily due to the difficulty in calculating one’s support from family members. To calculate such support, the researchers incorporated the Likert scale into the surveys which were distributed to 240 students at the University of Texas at Arlington. Through examining the participants’ perceptions of family support, the researchers found that those who reported higher levels of support from family members yielded higher GPAs. Thus, they concluded that a positive correlation between family support and academic achievement exists (Cheng, Ickes & Verhofstadt, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

While employment plays an important role in a student’s life, so does the level of involvement with one’s academics. For the purpose of this study, Astin’s theory of student involvement served as a framework. In this theory, Astin stated “the extent to which students can achieve particular developmental goals is a direct function of the time and effort they devote to activities designed to produce these gains” (Astin, 1999, p. 522).
In his theory, Astin formulated five basic postulates. Of the five, postulates two and four are relevant to the current study.

Postulate two, states “...involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times” (Astin, 1999, p. 519). For the present study, this establishes the need to examine a large sample of students, because all are on different levels of being involved with academics, and by researching the sample population, a better understanding of the trends among these participants can be examined.

The fourth postulate states that “the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program” (Astin, 1999, p. 519). Therefore, working extra hours in a job would negatively impact the quality and quantity of involvement with academics as measured by GPA. In relation to academics, this postulate establishes that in order to obtain a higher level of academic achievement, one must devote more time to studying and participating in activities related to the course work. As shown in Robotham’s study (2012) though, working too many hours a week can lead to being unable to devote as much time to studying; thus leading to lower levels of academic achievement.

Summary

The literature written above establishes background information regarding the impact of employment on one’s academic achievement. Through research, the researcher establishes three common themes among studies relevant to employment and academic
achievement: impact of employment, on versus off campus employment, and priority of academics. Further, the researcher has chosen the Astin's theory of student involvement to serve as a framework for the present study based on its postulates concerning the level of involvement in relation to academics (Astin, 1999).
CHAPTER III
Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology used to conduct the present study. Through the methodology, data were collected to provide a better understanding of the relationship of employment on students' academic achievement.

Design of Study

The current study was conducted by using both a descriptive and correlational research approach to examine the relationship between academics and employment among college students. A descriptive research approach was used to examine the nature of student employment and academic achievement at the research site. This approach was used due to its ability to collect data pertaining to the characteristics of the participant's relationship with academics and employment (Fraenkel, Hyun, & Wallen, 2012). A correlational research approach was used to see if a relationship between employment and academic achievement exists among the participants. This approach was deemed fit for this study due to the ability to run correlational analyses that showed if there was a relationship between the two variables, employment and academic achievement, while also providing the opportunity to predict if such a relationship even exists (Fraenkel, Hyun, & Wallen, 2012).

Participants

After cleaning of data, 421 undergraduate students that attend a midsized Midwestern four-year public university with over 8,000 students were used for the present study. Participants were required to have an established GPA by the time of the study so that information could be linked between their academic achievement and
employment. This population was chosen due to the nature of the study consisting of students that were either employed or not employed while taking courses. Participants were asked to partake in the research via an email that was sent to them containing the background of the research and the questionnaire to be used. The researcher received responses initially from roughly 1100 participants; 421 of which were usable as shown in Table 3.1. Of the 421 participants, the average age was 20 years old (SD=1.5). For those employed, the average number of hours worked was 14.89 (SD=6.92).

Table 3.1

Demographics of 421 Undergraduate Students Used for the Present Study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>21.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>78.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>13.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>76.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>20.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>24.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>35.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>19.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Site

This research was conducted at a public, midsized predominately white public institution located in the Midwest. The institution studied has over 8,000 students; over 7000 of which are undergraduate students. Of the undergraduate students, roughly 87%
identify as full-time students. Students employed at the institution studied must be enrolled in six or more credit hours per semester and must not work more than 42 hours on a bi-weekly pay period while the institution is in session. Students employed off-campus are not restricted to a specific number of hours per pay period. This location was chosen to best fit the study due to the accessibility of participants and the lack of research conducted thus far at this location in relation to the study.

**Instrument**

The instrument for the study was composed of an electronic questionnaire generated by the researcher and administered through Qualtrics. This questionnaire was designed to generate data that could be used to examine if there was a relationship between the employment of a student and their academic success. The questionnaire was created due to the lack of related research questionnaires already created that would allow for significant data collection.

The questionnaire was composed of questions pertaining to the participant’s demographic background (e.g. “Which of the following best represents your race/ethnicity?”) and experience with being an employed student taking academic courses in an institution of higher education (e.g. “On average, how many hours per week are devoted towards studying for academics?”). The questions were comprised of multiple choice answers with the option to type in a response that is not listed (see Appendix for survey questions). Asking questions about the demographics of the participants and their experience with balancing academics and employment through multiple choice questions, made it easier to find, if any, specific correlations between the two through using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program.
Data Collection

Electronic questionnaires were distributed approximately seven weeks into the 2015 fall semester, to allow students to use the previous semesters’ GPA. Email addresses of potential participants were obtained from the registrar’s office located on campus at the research site. The questionnaires were distributed via email by using Qualtrics, a survey generating program. The questionnaires were active for two weeks to allow ample time for students to participate. A reminder was sent out at day seven to increase the sample size. At the end of data collection, data was exported to Microsoft Excel to be cleaned and prepared for data analysis.

Treatment of Data

Data gathered from participants was collected through Qualtrics. After all data had been compiled, the information was transferred into Excel spreadsheets. The data was then imported into SPSS for statistical analysis. Once the data had been compiled into SPSS, the file containing the data was stored on a password protected flash drive to maintain confidentiality. Per IRB policy, the flash drive containing the data will be kept for three years after completion of the research.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through SPSS. Through the application of the program, a statistical analysis was ran to calculate the descriptive statistics that will arise from the data. To see if there were relationships for the four research questions, the following tests were conducted:

RQ1: A correlational analysis was conducted to see if there was a relationship between hours worked and academic performance among participants.
RQ2: A correlational analysis was conducted to see if there was a relationship between hours worked and hours spent studying.

RQ3: An analysis was not able to be conducted due to the results found in research question 2.

RQ4: An independent sample t test was conducted to see if there was a relationship between academic achievement and place of employment.

Results from the above research questions will be presented in the following chapter.

Summary

This chapter explained the procedures that took place in the study to properly examine the relationship between employment and academic achievement among college students. The process of completing this study included information pertaining to the design, sample population, location, survey, and proper use of data collection that was utilized to carry out the needed procedures to draw accurate conclusions.
CHAPTER IV

Results

The study was conducted using data collected from results concerning participants attending a public four year mid-sized institution in the Midwest. The survey yielded 421 usable responses from undergraduate students that identified as either being employed or not employed while in attendance at the institution used for the study. Below are the findings of the four research questions that examined the relationship between employment and academic achievement.

Research Question 1

To further explore the question, “what is the nature of the relationship between hours worked and academic performance among college students,” a correlational analysis was conducted. The correlational analysis was conducted to test the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between the two variables. Results from the analysis yielded non-significant finding that showed no correlation between hours worked and academic performance among college students, $r (418) = .019, p = .694$. Therefore, the researcher failed to reject $H_0$.

Research Question 2

Similar to the first research question, a correlational analysis was chosen to test whether or not there was a relationship between hours worked and hours devoted to academics among college students. The researcher conducted the analysis to test that null hypothesis which states that there is no relationship between hours worked and hours devoted to academics. Upon completion of the analysis, test yielded non-significant
results that show that there was no relationship between the two variables $r(418) = .016$, $p = .743$. Therefore, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question was proposed in order to see if there was a threshold at which being employed for a certain amount of hours while a student would begin to negatively impact a student’s GPA. To be able to further explore this research question, a curvilinear regression analysis would only be deemed necessary if RQ2 was able to successfully reject $H_02$. As presented earlier, the researcher was not able to reject $H_02$, and therefore was unable to ascertain the number of hours per week which negatively impacts the participant’s GPA.

**Research Question 4**

Employment for participants in the current study could have taken place either on or off campus, and the final research question was proposed to explore if there was a difference in GPA among participants that were employed on campus versus off campus. To further examine this question, an independent sample t-test was conducted to test $H_04$, which states that there is no relationship between place of employment and GPA. The results from the test revealed insignificant results that show little differences, as shown in Table 4.1, in the mean GPA of participants that were employed either on or off campus $t(194)=.505$, $p = .614$. Therefore, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis.
Table 4.1

Means and Standard Deviation of GPA among College Students Employed On and Off-Campus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of Employment</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Campus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours Worked</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>11.82</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off Campus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours Worked</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>6.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

Four research questions were proposed in order to further explore the nature of employment on the current study's population. After conducting appropriate tests, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis written for their respective research questions, and one research question was unable to be addressed due to its relationship to RQ2. The following chapter will further discuss these findings and how they compare to those found in chapter two.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

Through reviewing literature on the impact of employment on academic achievement among students attending various institutions of higher education, research questions emerged that would be further examined through analyzing data collected from the researcher's questionnaire. Analysis of this data was presented in the previous chapter, and this final chapter presents the present study's findings and how they compare to results found in literature on this area of research. To conclude the discussion of the findings and their relationship to other research, limitations of the research and implications for further studies will be presented along with an overview of the overall research presented in this document.

Impact on Coursework.

The present study is founded on research that shows mixed effects that being employed as a student has on one's GPA. Going back to literature discussed in chapter two, research has found that pending the population studied, GPA can be either positively or negatively impacted by working while taking courses. Three studies similar to the present study were able to test the threshold at which GPA is negatively impacted, and their results yielded data ranging from 16 to 20 hours per week (Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2008; Kosi, Nastav, & Šušteršič, 2013; Salamonson & Andrew, 2006). Similarly Dadgar (2012), DeSimone (2008), and Torres et al. (2013) also explored the relationship of employment and GPA, and they found negative correlations between the two variables. While these researchers' populations were negatively impacted by being employed, two studies both found positive correlations between employment and hours worked among
students. Stinebrickner and Stinebrickner (2003) concluded that for every hour worked, their participants saw at least a .02% increase in their GPA. Even at the community college level where students tend to work more hours, researchers found that employed students yielded higher grades than unemployed students (Kalenskoski & Pabilonia, 2008).

Acknowledging that far more research has found negative correlations between hours worked and GPA, the present study sought to examine if such a negative correlation existed at the institution being studied. Through conducting an analysis of the data received, the study failed to provide evidence that there was a relationship between the two variables. Therefore, it can be interpreted that for the population studied, being employed did not have a significant effect on their GPA. Students in the study that work many hours each week still have the same chance of having a higher or lower GPA than students that only work a couple hours per week. Finding no correlation is supported by Astin’s fourth postulate in his theory of student involvement, which states that “the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program” (Astin, 1999, p. 519). Tying this postulate into the research, the theory suggests that there was no significant correlation between GPA and hours worked because students are not impacted by how many hours they work, but by the quality and quantity of their effort towards trying to achieve a higher grade in their courses.

**Hours Devoted Towards Academics**

Astin’s (1999) theory suggested that quantity impacts personal development; this study also examined whether or not hours worked impacts the amount of time students
devoted towards their academics, whether that be studying or working on assignments. As discussed in previous chapters, prior research has found that being employed while a student often leads to fewer hours being devoted towards their academics (Manthei & Gilmore, 2005; Robotham, 2012). In order to determine if quantity might be a factor, the survey in the present study asked students how many hours they devoted towards academics each week. The results from the survey showed that there was no significant correlation between hours worked and hours devoted towards academics, meaning that even though students work different hours, there was no trend that would suggest that increased hours towards working lead to fewer or more hours devoted towards academics. After finding no correlation between either the amount of time spent towards academics and GPA in relation to the amount of hours a student works each week, the only part left of Astin's fourth postulate (1999) to test was the quality of time devoted towards academics, which was not addressed in the present study due to the lack of existing models that would test such quality.

**Place of Employment**

With institutions limiting the amount of hours students are able to work on-campus, many are left looking towards off-campus employment to generate enough funds to afford their education. With respect to on-campus employment, students are often limited in the amount of hours they can work so that they still have time to balance their work and their academics. Some positions even allow students to work on their coursework during their shifts when there is downtime.

Acknowledging that students are allowed to work off-campus as many hours as they would like, it makes sense to assume that working on-campus would yield higher
GPAs, and previous research is split on that notion. Lang (2012) studied students employed on and off-campus, and found that students employed on-campus not only have more time to devote to academic and social activities, but are also more likely to have higher grades than those employed off-campus. This differs from Wenz and Yu's (2010) research, which found that of their participants, on-campus employment led to .13 lower GPAs than students employed off-campus. Having research that produces contrasting depictions of the effects of place of employment, it was crucial to ask participants in the present study whether they were employed on or off-campus to see if place of employment was in fact a factor influencing students' GPAs. As found in the previous chapter, when looking at place of employment, an analysis showed that there was little difference between GPAs for students employed on and off-campus. Students employed off-campus on average yielded only .03 higher GPAs than students employed on-campus. Comparing this finding to the findings with contrasting data on the effects of place of employment, there are no consistent findings on this specific area of student employment.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Considering the findings of the present study and research found on the nature of employment for students, recommendations for future research on this topic have been developed that would help institutions better understand the balancing act of academics and employment. As mentioned earlier, quality was not a characteristic that was examined through the present study, and has proved to be a factor that could influence one's GPA. While hours devoted towards academics was examined, how participants used these hours was not. Having no correlations between the amount of hours a student
works and the amount of hours spent towards academics, there must be differences in the quality of their hours spent on coursework. A future study should be conducted that can examine such characteristic. It is also worth considering that with the nature of a quantitative study, measuring such a characteristic might prove difficult. Therefore, a mixed-methods study might yield more meaningful results with specific stories from students on how they spend their time towards academics when not working.

Secondly, it would be worth designing a study that was able to track students throughout an entire academic year. The present study only implemented a one-time questionnaire for participants that asked them to reflect on their previous spring semester. Future research would prove beneficial if able to track differences on GPA among students from fall to spring semesters. Research might find that the number of hours worked in the fall differ from the spring, and differences could be found in their academic achievements. With sending out questionnaires to the same population after each semester, it is worth considering whether tracking hours worked and hours spent towards academics are variables that should be logged each week. Doing so would decrease the likelihood that students would inaccurately report such data. Participants in the present study were asked to reflect on their spring semester months after the spring semester ended. The ability for participants to log their hours as they finish each week would help future studies be able to accurately portray how employment affects their academics.

After examining the effectiveness of the questionnaire implemented for the present study, further research would need to consider a more thorough instrument. While the instrument was able to examine the nature of employment and academics at a small level, it proved unsuccessful in fully exploring the relationship between the two
variables. To do so would require an instrument developed that went beyond just reporting hours spent and where employment took place to questions that asked exactly what type of employment the student was engaged in and whether or not it was relative to the degree being pursued.

Limitations of Study

During the implementation of the present study, many limitations arose that inhibited the potential of collecting significant findings on the relationship of academics and employment. During the distribution of the questionnaire to the target population, the email invitation was sent out to all students on-campus, which included graduate students. The nature of the study was only designed to examine undergraduate students, and the questionnaire used did not include a demographical question that could let graduate students identify their class status. After this fault was noted, a choice to identify as a graduate student was included on the questionnaire when a reminder email was sent out to the same population again. Noting that most graduate students most likely identified as seniors on the initial response of the email, all seniors that filled out the survey before the reminder email were removed from the study. The failure to include a demographical question for graduate students led to a significant loss in the number of participants studied. Having corrected this limitation before the distribution of the questionnaire would have increased the total population studied. This increase could have shifted the data to yield significant results; which the present studied failed to yield.

Another limitation of the study arose when analyzing the data, as participants were not given an opportunity to disclose if they were part-time or full-time students during the time of employment. This proved to be a flaw of the study, as data showed
that many nontraditional students were included in the study that were working an excess of 30 hours per week. To remove any outlier data, students that were over the age of 25 and worked over 30 hours per week were removed from the study.

Lastly, the participants were asked to reflect on their employment and hours spent towards academics seven months later. Sending out the questionnaire this late questions the reliability of participants’ ability to accurately remember the number of hours spent working and studying. The study should have been sent out immediately following the spring semester so that students could more accurately reflect on that semester.

Conclusion

Being employed while a student will always be a balancing act that has shown to be challenging for some, but rewarding for others. Though research has shown that students are all affected differently by being employed, literature presented in the present study demonstrates that how employment affects students is directly related to the nature of the campus climate at the institutions being studied. Through the distribution of a questionnaire concerning the nature of employment, the present study was unable to find relationships between being employed and academics. While data yielded insignificant results, recommendations have been made that could be used to more effectively explore the balancing act of academics and being employed.
References


U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data

APPENDIX A

Emailed Invitation for Participation
Subject: Survey: Impact of Employment on Academic Achievement

Body:

Hello EIU Student,

You are invited to participate in a research study about employment while attending Eastern Illinois University. The main purpose of this study is to examine the impact of employment on one's academic achievement. You were selected because you identify as a student attending Eastern Illinois University.

Completion of the survey will only take approximately 5 minutes, and if you successfully complete the survey, you will be given the opportunity to provide your email address, which will be used to enter yourself into a drawing for a $30 Visa gift card.

Click on the link below to be taken to the survey.
[INSERT LINK]

Thank you for your consideration in participating in this thesis research.

If you have any questions for the researcher, feel free to contact: Canaan Daniels by phone at (217) 883-0123 or by email at cldaniels@eiu.edu or Richard Roberts (Faculty Supervisor) at (217) 581-2400.

If you have any more questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write: Institutional Review Board, Eastern Illinois University, 600 Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL 61920, Telephone (217)581-8576, E-Mail: eiuirb@eiu.edu.
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent/Participant Questionnaire
Dear EIU student,

Thank you for your consideration in participating in this study.

If you wish to participate, you will be asked to complete a one-time questionnaire. Completion of this questionnaire should take approximately 5 minutes. Your name will not be attached to the scores, and any demographics used to identify you will be grouped into aggregate data. Your participation will be completely confidential and the primary researcher will be the only one with access to all the data. Based on completion of the questionnaire, you will be asked to provide your email address, which will be placed into a drawing for a $30 Visa gift card.

The risks associated with participation are minimal. You should not experience any legal, physical, or psychological harm based on participation. Your decision of whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relation with Eastern Illinois University or the department of Counseling and Student Development. If you choose not to participate at any time during the study, you have the right to remove yourself from the study.

By clicking "yes" you agree to participate voluntarily in all aspects of this study. Understand that you have the option of removing yourself from the study at any time and give your approval of all findings to be enclosed within the research.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this thesis research.

If you have any questions for the researcher, feel free to contact: Canaan Daniels by phone at (217) 883-0123 or by email at cldaniels@eiu.edu or Richard Roberts (Faculty Supervisor) at (217)581-2400.

If you have any more questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write: Institutional Review Board, Eastern Illinois University, 600 Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL 61920, Telephone (217)581-8576, E-Mail: eiuirb@eiu.edu.

Do you wish to continue?

Yes

No

Which of the following best represents your race/ethnicity?

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian or Pacific Islander
Black/African American
Hispanic/Latino
White/Caucasian
Other (please specify)

What is your gender?
Male
Female
Other

What is your age (Example: 24)?

What is your grade classification?
Freshman
Sophomore
Junior
Senior
Alumni (Graduated Spring 2015)

What is your current Grade Point Average (GPA) (Example: 2.75)?

Are you currently employed on campus, off campus, or both?
On campus
Off campus
Both
I am not currently employed
How many jobs do you currently hold (Example: 2)?

Is one of your jobs outside of Charleston, Illinois?
Yes
No

Are you allowed to study at work?
Yes
No

On average, how many hours are spent each week working (Example: 13)?

On average, how many hours are spent each week studying (Example: 6)?

On average, how many hours are spent each week on extracurricular activities eg. athletics, clubs/organizations (Example: 10 hours)

To be entered to win the $30 Visa gift card, please provide your email address below.