

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY



STUDENT EMPLOYMENT SUPERVISOR HANDBOOK 2023-2024

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Foreword

Supervising student employees is significantly different from supervising full-time workers. Many of the students entering college as traditional-aged first year students will not have learned or developed all the skills required to perform at an entry level position.

When students arrive on campus for the first time, they may not have had any formal training. Lack of instruction, combined with limited work experience, can result in an additional challenge for supervisors who themselves may have limited experience with training an inexperienced or transient work force.

WSU is committed to providing the best possible education to students both in and out of the classroom. With this in mind, supervisors are educators. The student employment experience provides the setting for the supervisor to teach and observe student critical thinking skills. There is also the opportunity for the student to develop work-related skills as a catalyst to professional employment.

Many students are turning to student employment where they can gain valuable work experience plus a degree. The Supervisor Handbook serves to help foster professional growth and broaden the supervisor's employee "tool kit."

This manual is written to outline the University's practices concerning the terms and conditions of student employment. The practices stated in this manual are intended as guidelines only and are subject to change.

Description of Washington State University Student Employment

Student Employment at WSU is intended to help students meet educational expenses, apply critical and integrative thinking skills, and link extracurricular activities with classroom activities. WSU offers two categories of student employment:

Work-study

Work-study recipients have the option to work either on-campus or with an approved off-campus employer. The work-study award amount for the academic year varies per student and is based on the number of hours listed and the rate of pay by the employer on the Work-Study Authorization Form (WSAF), or as determined through the off-campus contract.

Once a student is deemed eligible for work-study, they will receive a notification via their zzusis account along with a link to download their personal WSAF. If a student is pursuing off-campus employment, they should not complete the WSAF and instead complete additional forms that must be signed. Eligibility for work-study is contingent on the student maintaining at least half-time enrollment.

For on-campus employment, there is a maximum award amount, unless the student's position is approved as a qualified internship or the position description is directly related to the student's program of study. If the funding request is more than the maximum award amount, the employer must attach a position description with the WSAF.

For off-campus employment, there is also a maximum award amount. However, for a student to utilize work-study off campus, the position must be directly related to their program of study.

On-campus work-study

Work-study funds pay 60% of the student wages up to the limit of the students' work-study award for each term. The department match is 40%. When the work-study limit is reached, departmental funds pay 100% of the students' wages. On-campus wages are governed by the [state classification/compensation plan](#).

Off-campus work-study

The purpose of the Off-Campus Work-Study Program is to reimburse employers a percentage of gross pay for positions that are directly related to the student's major or are community service positions.

To become an approved off-campus work-study employer, the employer must provide a job that is directly related to the student's major (RCW 28.B12.060) or is a non-profit nonsectarian community service organization. The student must be a Washington state resident awarded work study funding.

Approved off-campus work-study employers pay work-study students the same as any other employee including FICA, Workman's Compensation, and Federal Income Tax and any other taxes. The employer requests reimbursement by submitting timesheets to the Student Financial Services office at WSU Pullman. The reimbursement rate for **for-profit employers is 40%** of the gross pay up to the limit of the student's work-study award for the term and for **non-profit community service providers, it is 70%** of the

gross pay up to the limit of the student's work- study award for the term. *The employer is responsible for 100% of the wages earned once the work study funds have been utilized.*

Work Study Eligibility

Eligibility for work-study is determined by a valid Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) that was filed on or before the published priority filing date, indication on the FAFSA that he or she is interested in work study, have need based eligibility and no problems with maintaining Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP).

Work-study student employees may work up to an average of 19 hours per week while classes are in session. During approved academic breaks, work-study student employees may work up to 19 hours per week provided their award covers this amount and they are registered for classes for the following semester.

Student Hourly

Non-work-study employees' work in on- and off-campus positions. The employer pays 100% of the student wages.

Although International students do not complete the FAFSA, they may be employed by WSU if the student is authorized to attend WSU and is in lawful F-1 visa status. They may consult with the staff of the Office of International Students and Scholars for more information. All international students must obtain a U.S. Social Security Number before employment can begin, and the application requires a letter documenting an offer of employment.

Supervisors are encouraged to remember that students participate in student employment for a variety of reasons, including:

- The flexibility of scheduled work hours around their class schedules.
- The opportunity to learn valuable analytical and critical thinking skills.
- The opportunity to gain valuable experiences and marketable skills to add to a resume.
- To obtain employment references as supervisors can serve as references in the future.

Advertising Your Student Employee Position

Student Employment provides an online employment system called **Handshake** (<https://wsu.joinhandshake.com/>) that serves as a central repository for student employment jobs (both on- and off-campus, student work-study, student hourly, and non-student employment). This website has valuable tools to assist you with the hiring process.

The site is designed to provide employers with a self-service mechanism to post student jobs. The functionality is efficient and user friendly. Once you add a job, the Student Employment staff will need to review and approve the posting. Once approved, the opportunity for students to apply is immediately available on **Handshake**.

On-Campus Employment Policies and Procedures

Handshake and the Temporary Employment System (TEMPS) work to facilitate advertising your student job(s) and getting the student whom is hired into the payroll system. So, after you post your job announcement, review student applicants, and select your student employee(s) on Student Employment Jobs site, you will also need to complete the employer portion of the Work-Study Authorization Form that is provided to the student. Once this form is completed, it is the student's responsibility to submit the completed form to Student Employment in the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships.

It is important to note that the Work-Study Authorization Form (WSAF) does not automatically ensure a work-study award. The award will be determined by the Financial Aid Office after the WSAF has been completed, signed and returned. Awards are contingent upon available funding and financial aid eligibility. Do NOT allow the student to work prior to work-study approval as you may not be reimbursed for unauthorized hours. Once a decision has been made, Student Financial Services will email both the student and the employer with the results. Once the employer receives notice that the student has been awarded work-study, the employer then can enter the student's information into the online Temporary Employment System (TEMPS) to create, update, and display temporary work- study positions and appointments. However, to access, enter, and/or approve information in the TEMPS system, employers must attend training and obtain approval from the department appointment authority and Human Resources (HRS). Contact Human Resource Services for information about TEMPS training and access; telephone 509-335-4521.

Rehiring a Work-Study Student Employee

Employers that wish to keep a work-study student on staff for the next academic year can notify Student Employment prior to fall start up to request a continued work-study award. However, this request is contingent on the student having continued work-study eligibly based on their FAFSA, need, and available funding.

Definition of a Student

For purposes of temporary employment, a student is one who is enrolled at WSU for six or more credit hours during the entirety of a fall or spring semester and/or for three or more credit hours for the entirety of at least one of the summer sessions.

Students enrolled for less than six credit hours during fall or spring semester or for less than three credit hours for a summer session who receive financial aid are also considered students.

For purposes of hourly retirement only, a student is enrolled at WSU for ten credits or more during the fall or spring semester. Students enrolled in nine or less credits are monitored for retirement eligibility.

Replacing Civil Service or Collective Bargaining Unit Employees

Student temporary employees may not be hired to replace civil service or collective bargaining unit employees who are laid off due to lack of funds or lack of work. Student temporary

employees may not be hired to fill a position currently or formerly occupied by a civil service or collective bargaining unit employee during the current or prior calendar year or fiscal year.

Hours of Work

State regulations limit student employment to a maximum of 516 hours worked in any six consecutive months, excluding students employed in their major field of study, hours worked during the summer and other academic year holiday breaks (WAC 357-04-040). WSU academic holidays are periods when school is not in session. The following types of students are exempt from the hour limitations, in accordance with WAC 357-04-040:

- Student body officers or student organization jobs such as student officers or student news staff members.
- Students employed in jobs which are directly related to their major fields of study and which provide training opportunities.
- Students in documented and approved internship programs which consist of academic components and work experience.

Work-Study (On Campus)

Work-Study Program

The work-study program provides low- and middle-income students an opportunity to earn money for college instead of deferring costs by increasing loan debt. The program also encourages community service work and work related to each student's course of study helping the student to gain valuable work experience. Work-study is a need based financial aid award that is often misunderstood. It is neither a grant as you must work to earn it nor a loan as you do not have to pay it back. However, funds are limited, and you must qualify for need-based financial aid in order to receive work-study. Work-study never reduces grants or scholarships; it is only added in place of loans! The work-study funds are awarded to qualifying students to assist them in obtaining employment. Every academic year work-study funds are available to be awarded to students with the possibility of offering work-study during summer session (pending on funding availability).

The work-study program subsidizes the students wage, whereby funds are used to pay a large percentage of students' gross pay but do not pay 100% of the wages. The gross pay comes from two sources; work-study funds, plus the employer funds. The program serves as an incentive for employers to hire students, creating jobs that would not otherwise exist. When the accumulated gross pay earned during the term reaches the work-study award limit, the work-study funding stops, and the employers' funds pay 100% of any wages earned that exceed the work-study award limit for the term. For off campus work-study, with respect to the Revised Code of Washington (RCW), it is WSU's student employment policy that students must seek employment that is directly related to his/her major. The emphasis for the off-campus work-study program is to provide students with job experience that is directly related to their vocational interest (RCW 28B.12.060).

Work-Study Eligibility

Work-study eligibility is determined by filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for the current year. Students must file the FAFSA by the priority filing date for that academic year, express interest in work-study on the FAFSA, demonstrate a minimum of \$1000

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Lighty 180 | 509-335-6634 | studentjobs@wsu.edu

of financial need, maintain enrollment of at least half-time status, and maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP). To demonstrate financial need, the method used in determining eligibility is the total cost of attendance minus the expected family contribution (EFC), minus any scholarships or grants equals the work-study eligibility. If a student is eligible and funding is available, the student will be notified through their MyWSU account that they qualified and will be issued a Work-Study Authorization Form (WSAF). However, if the student is securing an off-campus job they are requested to not complete the form and contact the Student Employment Office as there are additional requirements that must be met for off-campus employment.

It is then the student's responsibility to secure employment. Once the student has received an offer for employment, the student and the employer would then complete the WSAF and submit the completed form (or off-campus forms) to Student Financial Services. It is important to note that this form does not automatically ensure a work-study award. The award will be determined by Student Financial Services after the WSAF has been processed or the off-campus contact has been approved by the state. Awards are contingent upon available funding and financial aid eligibility. The awarding is made on a first come, first serve basis.

Once a decision has been made, Student Financial Services will email both the student and the employer regarding work-study eligibility. If approved for a work-study award, Student Financial Services will indicate the amount of work-study that can be earned during the award period on the student's financial aid award. The work-study on the financial aid award is a placeholder that tracks gross earnings. After the gross pay has been earned in the amount of your award, the employer will not get reimbursed for any earnings that exceed the amount of the award.

Generally, international students on nonimmigrant visas are ineligible for work-study positions and non-student.

Benefits of Work-Study and Student Hourly Employment

Work-study earnings do not count as earned income on the FAFSA and will not affect your aid eligibility. The amount earned assists with covering part of college costs rather than increasing loans. Many employers seek work-study students to fill open positions because the work-study program pays 40% -70% of student work-study wages. Your employer must pay part of the student's hourly earnings and either the state or federal government pays the rest. Work-study regulations do not allow the work-study program to pay 100% of earnings. For off-campus employment, your employer will pay 30% -60% of wages depending upon the employer type and the work done. Off-campus nonprofit organizations pay 30% of earnings up to the work-study award limit if community service work is being performed, and for-profit organizations pay 60% of earnings up to the work-study award limit. All on-campus departments pay 40% of work-study wages. Earnings are distributed in the form of a paycheck. Giving the student the ability to decide how the money is distributed within their own budget. Student employment provides the opportunity to gain valuable work experience and related job skills that can be applied to future careers.

Work-Study Award Amounts

For on-campus employment, Work-Study award amounts vary by student and are determined by the number of hours listed by the employer on the (WSAF) as well as if the position is directly related to the student's program of study. However, if the position is not directly related

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to the student's program of study there is a standard maximum award for on-campus employment. This award amount is subject to change yearly. For off campus employment, there is also a standard maximum award (which is subject to change yearly). The dollar amount that is awarded to the student is indicated on the student's award notification from financial aid. The total award amount is split between fall and spring semesters. For example, if the total award is \$2,000, then the total amount you can earn for each semester is \$1,000 before your employer stops getting reimbursed. Any amount that is earned over the given work-study award is the responsibility of the employer. Unused award amounts do not roll over to the next semester. If a work-study award is granted after financial aid has been disbursed it is possible that the student's loan amounts may be reduced to make room for the work-study award.

Work-Study Assignment

Jobs are not assigned to individual students. It is the student's responsibility to find a job by using the available resources. The online website, Handshake is the best place to start. Remember, if seeking employment off-campus, it needs to be directly related to the major. Non-profit non-sectarian community service employers are always eligible to participate in the off-campus work study program. All students are encouraged to work for community service employers.

Student Employee Orientation Checklist

You can download a temporary Employee Orientation Checklist at <https://hrs.wsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Temporary-Employee-Orientation-Checklist.pdf>.

Student employees should also receive a copy of the following documents:

- University's Alcohol and Drug Policy
- Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy and Complaint Procedures

Employment of Minors

Contact Human Resource Services (HRS) to review the position's duties and hours of employment before employing a minor (anyone under 18 years of age). The employing department is responsible for securing parental consent before hiring a minor. The department obtains a Parents/School Authorization for Employment of a Minor form from the State of Washington Department of Labor and Industries website at: <http://www.lni.wa.gov/>. Select Workplace Rights, then select Teen Workers—Forms and Publications.

The employing department completes the top portion of the form and sends it to the minor's parent for authorization. After the parent returns the signed form, the department retains the authorization in the employee's departmental personnel file.

WSU units are not to employ anyone less than 16 years of age. In unusual circumstances permission to hire 14- and 15-year-old individuals may be granted by HRS on an exception basis. Direct detailed written exception requests to HRS.

Benefits

Employees have new rights, and employers have significant new responsibilities under Washington's Paid Sick Leave law, which was passed by voters in 2016 as part of Initiative 1433. As of Jan. 1, 2018, employers in Washington State are required to provide paid sick leave to their employees.

It is best to discuss this sick leave with your employer. Notifying your employer when you are sick is generally a rule of employment. It is your responsibility to discuss these procedures with your employer.

Holidays

WSU Academic holidays are periods when school is not in session. During vacations, employment of students can be full-time under certain conditions. Students must be continuously enrolled and if a student's employment exceeds eligibility in terms of gross earnings or dates of eligibility, the employer is required to pay 100 percent of the non-eligible wages. The law limits student employment to a maximum of 516 hours (*students employed in major field of study are exempt from the 516 limit*) worked in any six consecutive months, ***excluding hours worked during the summer and other academic year holiday breaks*** (WAC 357-04-040).

Break Times

Employees shall be allowed a meal period of at least 30 minutes which commences no less than two hours nor more than five hours from the beginning of the shift. Meal periods shall be on the employer's time when the employee is required by the employer to remain on duty on the premises or at a prescribed work site in the interest of the employer. No employee shall be required to work more than five consecutive hours without a meal period.

Employees working three or more hours longer than a normal work day shall be allowed at least one 30-minute meal period prior to or during the overtime period. Employees shall be allowed a rest period of not less than 10 minutes, on the employer's time, for each 4 hours of working time. Rest periods shall be scheduled as near as possible to the midpoint of the work period. No employee shall be required to work more than three hours without a rest period. When the nature of the work allows employees to take intermittent rest periods equivalent to 10 minutes for each 4 hours worked, scheduled rest periods are not required (WAC 296-126-092).

WSU's Conditions of Student Employment

Student employment is *employment at will*. Students may be dismissed or rehired as determined by their supervisor.

If student employees want permanent employment, they may apply at www.wsujobs.com when appropriate eligibility lists are open.

Sex Offenders and Student Employment

Any registered sex offender under active supervision must notify the County Sheriff's Department when they move into an area. If the individual is attending Washington State University the County Sheriff's Department will notify WSU's Chief-of-Police. The Chief-of-Police in-turn notifies the Vice-President for Business Affairs and Dean of Students.

A registered sex offender under active supervision who is working is also required to notify their employer. If a student informs Student Employment staff that they are a registered sex offender under active supervision the Student Employment Coordinator should 1) document

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the individual's probation officer 2) call the probation officer to verify that the employer was informed 3) call WSU Chief-of-Police if there are any questions. If a student employee self-identifies as a registered sex offender not under active supervision, the Student Employment Coordinator should contact the WSU Chief-of-Police and let them handle any disclosure of sex offender information.

There are specific statutes governing the confidentiality of particular types of information. Be careful not to disclose information which would violate an individual's right to confidentiality or privacy.

Job Classification and Pay Rates

Student hourly and work-study funded student employees are paid an hourly rate of pay in keeping with the duties and responsibility of the position, as appropriate within the pay schema. Work-study students who fill positions comparable in scope to work classified by the Washington Personnel Resource Board (WPRB) must be paid the WPRB prescribed hourly wage rate for that class, regardless of the institution's policy for paying other students or part-time employees. The institution must clearly identify each position that is not comparable to a WPRB classification and document its determination of non-comparability. Attached is the link to the Washington State University Student Employment Classification and Compensation Plan for State Work Study Wage Rates: <http://www.hrs.wsu.edu/Student%20Employment%20Class%20Comp%20Plan>

International Student Employees

An international student may be employed by WSU if the student is authorized to attend WSU and is in lawful F-1 or J-1 status. In addition, J-1 students must obtain written authorization from their program sponsor in order to engage in on-campus employment. Visit the Office of International Programs – Global Services for more details.

F-1 Status

Foreign students who hold F-1 nonimmigrant status are limited to 20 hours of work per week while school is in session. An F-1 student is a nonimmigrant who is pursuing a "full course of study" to achieve a specific educational or professional objective, at an academic institution in the United States that has been designated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to offer such courses of study to such students, has been enrolled in SEVIS (the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System). Once the educational or professional objective is attained, the F-1 student is expected by the

U.S. government to return to his or her residence abroad. F-1 students must present the following documents for SSN application:

- A valid SEVIS I-20
- A valid passport
- I-94 card
- F-1 visa stamp (or change of status approval)
- Photocopies of all above immigration documents
- A completed Social Security Card application form
- A letter issued by WSU International Programs
- A letter issued by student's on-campus employer (effective 10/13/04)

Acquiring F-1 Status

A student acquires F-1 status using Form I-20, issued by Washington State University, a DHS approved school through SEVIS. Status is acquired in one of two ways: 1) if the student is abroad, by entering the United States with the I-20 and an F-1 visa obtained at a US Consulate (Canadians are exempt for the visa requirement); or 2) if the student is already in the United States, by sending the I- 20 to US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) with an application for a change of nonimmigrant status.

Contact the Office of International Programs – Global Services for more information.

Resources:

For Consultation

- Student Employment, 509-335-6722
- Office of Human Resource Services, 509-335-4521
- Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships, 509-335-9711
- Office of International Programs – Global Services, 509-335-4508

For Policies and Procedures:

- WSU Student Employment Classification and Compensation Plan for State Work Study Wage Scales - <https://hrs.wsu.edu/employees/labor-relations/collective-bargaining/wsufse/wsufse-2023-2025-contract/#Article24>
- Temporary/Hourly Employee Recruitment Information - <https://hrs.wsu.edu/managers/recruitment-toolkit/temp-hourly-recruitment/>
- Alcohol and Drug Policy - <https://policies.wsu.edu/prf/index/manuals/executive-policy-manual/ep20/>
- Suspected Alcohol and Drug Use Manager Guidelines – https://hrs.wsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Guide_SuspectedAlcoholandDrugUse_March2023.pdf
- Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy and Complaint Procedures - <https://policies.wsu.edu/prf/index/manuals/executive-policy-manual-contents/ep15-discrimination-sexual-harassment-and-sexual-misconduct/>
- Employment of a Minor Guidelines - <https://lni.wa.gov/workers-rights/youth-employment/how-to-hire-minors>

Volunteers

Policy:

WSU departments must comply with provisions to ensure volunteers are covered for liability and workers' compensation. University employee policies apply to volunteers, and departments should direct questions to Human Resource Services (HRS).

Definition:

A volunteer must meet certain criteria, including performing authorized duties without receiving wages, freely choosing to perform duties, directly benefiting WSU, being supervised by WSU personnel, and being designated and registered as a volunteer.

Examples/Explanations:

Various scenarios can involve volunteers, such as interns receiving class credit or 4-H program volunteers. Employees performing their regular duties are not considered volunteers.

Designation/Registration:

Departments must designate and register volunteers before they perform duties, maintain records, and submit a Volunteer Monthly Report to HRS. Payroll Services charges workers' compensation quarterly premiums to the supervising department.

Safety Orientation:

Volunteers are subject to the same safety procedures orientation and training as employees.

Records Retention:

Volunteer files must be maintained for six years after termination of service.

Minors:

Parents or legal guardians must complete a Minor Volunteer Consent and Release form for minors under 18. Minors under 14 must be constantly supervised by an adult. Background checks are required for adults supervising minors without other adults present.

Monthly Report:

Departments must submit a completed Volunteer Monthly Report to HRS by the 15th of the month following each month of activity.

Form Templates:

The Volunteer Monthly Report is available in PDF and FileMaker format from PRF.

Liability Claims:

Volunteers acting in good faith within the scope of their assignment are covered under the Self-Insured Liability Program for claims made against them or WSU.

Additional Resources:

University volunteer information resources are available for further guidance.

[\(https://policies.wsu.edu/prf/index/manuals/business-policies-and-procedures-manual/bppm-60-81/\)](https://policies.wsu.edu/prf/index/manuals/business-policies-and-procedures-manual/bppm-60-81/)

For More Information Contact:
Human Resource Services
509-335-4521

The Student Work Experience

Mentoring Student Employees

Barbara Hammond, Ph.D. Director, Counseling and Testing Services

Some insights from psychology may help supervisors work even more effectively with student employees. Psychologists have learned that the key factor in determining whether counseling is a positive, helpful experience is the quality of the relationship between the client and the counselor. Similarly, student workers tend to be happier and more productive if they are able to develop a close, mutually respectful relationship with their supervisor. Developmentally, students are likely to be in a transition period of life that emphasizes involvement, independence, and initiative. Supervisors may want to capitalize upon these natural tendencies by getting student employees involved in the service mission as well as the fun activities of the unit, by allowing as much independence as possible, and by encouraging student initiative in structuring or personalizing their job to the extent possible. It may also be helpful to recognize that as students transition from their families, they may initially relate to the people in their work environment as they related with their families. Thus, they may expect support and nurturance, have difficulty with authority, or alternately collaborate or compete with fellow student workers. It can be helpful for supervisors to gently, but consistently, emphasize the professional standards and roles of the workplace. Student employees typically bring fresh perspectives and enthusiasm to an office that more than compensates for the additional training and supervision they may require.

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

In the spring of 2007, Student Employment in partnership with the Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning (<http://oai.wsu.edu/>) piloted a student employment rubric called the Guide to Rating Professional Performance in Learning Organizations. Based on the WSU Critical & Integrative Thinking Rubric, the Professional Performance rubric was developed to address skills that have been identified as critical components for graduates entering the work force. Experiential learning situations provide students with opportunities to learn and acquire a variety of transferable skills that are beneficial regardless of where they seek future employment, including:

- Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
- Teamwork/Collaboration
- Professionalism/Work Ethic
- Oral and Written Communications

The benefit of using a rubric instead of a performance evaluation is that rubrics promote a formative process; they can be used as a reference point for student improvement because students can see the next level on the rubric and the criteria involved to reach the next level.

Students participating in the pilot project worked closely with their supervisors, receiving rubric-based feedback and documenting their own professional learning growth via rubric-based self-assessment and reflective essays. One-hundred and eight students in six departments participated in the pilot program.

In addition, some of the students in the pilot program began to create electronic portfolios to capture the learning experience that occurred at the intersection between their work and academic lives. More than just an achievement showcase, e-portfolios are fast becoming a tool for investigation, reflection, and growth at many universities. They provide students with a vehicle for understanding their own learning growth across time and contexts (academic, workplace, community)—to place them in relation to society, which is one of WSU's 6 Goals of the Baccalaureate.

For more information, contact the Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning at OAI@wsu.edu, 509-335-1355.

Employers Seek Well-Rounded Grads Who Also Have Real-World Experience

Campus Career Counselor/February 2007 - By Peter Vog

Employers are looking for a lot more from today's college students and recent graduates—particularly in the way of cross-disciplinary knowledge and real-world experience gained through internships and similar activities, according to a recently released report from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).

College Learning for the New Global Century is the culmination of a 10-year AAC&U initiative in which leaders from business, education, labor, philanthropy, and policy collaborated to identify the “essential learning outcomes” of a 21st-century college education. Front and center in this effort was a revealing poll of 305 employers from across the United States, which concluded—generally speaking, at least—that colleges and universities need to boost their efforts to prepare well-rounded graduates who know how to succeed in real-world settings.

Soft Skills Required

If college students and recent graduates need proof that so-called “soft skills” matter to the people who will one day consider them for employment, the *College Learning* report offers it --- using data that are hard to discount.

Indeed, 56 percent of the employers surveyed said a college education should provide a balance of both training for a specific career field and broad-based knowledge and skills.

“It’s time to stop channeling students into narrow tracks that prepare them for an initial job but not for tomorrow’s challenges,” says AAC&U President Carol Geary Schneider.

“Engineers need to know how to communicate across diverse cultures, scientists need to think through the ethical implications of their work, and computer programmers need to understand the real-world conditions that shape the lives of those who will use their programs and products. A college education needs to give students more than technical knowledge; it needs to help them succeed in all aspects of work and life.”

The problem now, according to nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of the employers polled: Too many recent college grads lack the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in a global economy.

When asked which learning outcomes today’s colleges and universities should emphasize more, the employers in the survey rattled off what amounts to a soft-skills “most wanted” list. Examples (with percentages of employers calling for more emphasis): “Teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings” (82 percent) “The ability to effectively communicate, orally and in writing” (73 percent) “Global issues and developments, and their implications for the future” (72 percent) “The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources” (70 percent)

Applied Learning

Employers seek much more than theoretical “book knowledge,” though, the AAC&U report stresses. Specifically, employers “believe that higher education should give students more experience with real-world applications of their knowledge and skills through hands-on learning,” the report says.

Translation: Keep those internships, co-ops, and related experiences coming. As one employer in the survey put it: “I don’t think colleges and universities ... really teach these individuals the real world, what it’s like being out there in the real world, what the job requirements are ... I think internships do an amazing job in terms of education, educating people, versus your day-to-day, everyday, sitting-in-class learning-from-a book perspective.”

Seventy-three percent of the employers surveyed said colleges and universities should place more emphasis on “the ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings through internships or other hands-on experiences.”

Without such hands-on background, one employer concluded, college is “delayed reality” for students--and the employers who will one day have to teach them what they didn’t learn in school.