

## **Eduventures Helps the University of Maryland, College Park Deepen Understanding of Impact of Undergraduate On-Campus Student Employment**

### **Challenge:**

The University of Maryland, College Park (UM) wanted to improve its understanding of the skills being developed by students employed by the university and their level of satisfaction with their on-campus work experience.

### **Solution:**

To assist them with this goal, the Eduventures research team conducted a survey of undergraduate students employed on campus. Over 580 students responded to the survey including resident assistants, tutors, lab assistants, and office assistants .

### **Results:**

The research provided the University of Maryland with a much better understanding of the impact on-campus employment is having on their undergraduates. While the results affirmed that students felt they were developing important job-related skills through their jobs it also highlighted areas for improvement, including a need to better connect on-campus employment with student's academic and career goals.

### **About the University of Maryland, College Park**

*Location:* College Park, MD

*Carnegie Classification:* Doctoral

*Ownership:* Public Institution

*Size:* 26,475 Undergraduate Students (2008)

### **About Eduventures:**

Eduventures Learning Collaboratives are member-driven research programs that help more than 300 institutions of higher education achieve organizational goals and solve pressing challenges with evidence-based insight and guidance.

### **Looking for Hard Data**

In the fall of 2007, the Division of Student Affairs at the University of Maryland, College Park (UM) sought to improve its understanding of the impact of student employment on undergraduate students. Anecdotal evidence suggested that on-campus employment was an important opportunity for students to develop job-related skills that would help them after they graduated. Said Dr. Adrienne Hamcke Wicker, Assistant Director for Assessment at UM, "In Student Affairs we often talk about how great student employment is for our undergraduates and how it is not just a job but a chance to build important skills. However, we had not conducted a formal study on this topic so we were looking to quantify some of the things we knew intuitively to be true."

Although data about student employment had been collected by individual departments, UM realized that it needed data drawn from the entire university to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of student employment. They also knew they did not have the resources to conduct this research in-house. To assist them in this effort they turned to Eduventures to serve as an outsourced partner.

### **Uncovering the Right Questions to Ask**

The Eduventures research team first conducted a literature search to uncover past research on the topic of skills development within student employment. After identifying a list of specific skills to examine, the Eduventures team worked with the division of Student Affairs to define the objectives and scope of the study. After several iterations a survey was finalized and IRB approval was received.

Eduventures then deployed the web-based survey to a sample of undergraduate students employed by UM in a range of functions, including resident assistant, research assistant, tutor, and office assistant, eventually receiving over 580 responses.

*“The information from the report was helpful to me as a student staff employer....(This report) has given me a chance to think about ways to integrate the importance of elements such as esprit de corps with the other areas like providing progress towards career goals. I did pass this report to others, including my student staff. Thanks for all of the information, it was really helpful.”*

Supervisor  
Division of Student Affairs  
University of Maryland, College Park

## Key Insights to Inform Decision-Making

Overall the results of the survey were positive as students indicated high levels of satisfaction with their student employment. The Division of Student Affairs’ intuition that being employed on campus was beneficial was supported by data: 86% stated the job allowed them to make a positive contribution to the office/department for which they work and 84% noted that their job had helped them interact comfortably with people different from themselves. In addition, the students indicated that their campus employment was helping them develop important job-related skills that would be helpful after they graduated, with 83% stating that their job had helped them develop better interpersonal skills and 78% indicated they had improved their problem-solving skills.

The survey also uncovered areas in need of improvement. While 79% stated they had developed better verbal communication skills only 33% felt their job had improved their written communication skills. In addition, only 57% felt their job had improved their leadership skills. Finally while the students were generally positive about the skills they were developing, few saw a direct connection to their academic goals or future career as only 26% reported that their on-campus job had improved their academic performance and only 40% reported that it had helped them progress towards their career goals.

## Deepening the Impact of Student Employment Experiences

After receiving the results of the study, the Division of Student Affairs presented the data to the university through a campus-wide forum that was attended by a broad cross-section of university departments and functions that employ undergraduates. As a result several of the attendees indicated they would make changes in their approach towards student employees. As one anonymous attendee later wrote “The information from the report was helpful to me as a student staff employer....(This report) has given me a chance to think about ways to integrate the importance of elements such as esprit de corps with the other areas like providing progress towards career goals. I did pass this report to others, including my student staff...”

According to Dr. Wicker, the biggest impact of the study was that it helped the Division of Student Affairs understand more about student employment experiences and how they as supervisors can do more to further enhance student employment to have a positive impact on student’s academic experience and career preparation.

Said Wicker “Having Eduventures manage all the data collection and data analysis allowed us to undertake this assessment initiative without having to hire someone internally to get it done or further burden our already very busy staff . With everything else we are doing it can be hard to find time to conduct these types of initiatives so we appreciate having Eduventures as a partner we can turn to for help on projects like this.”

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