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Many students juggle work and school

Rising tuition puts undergrads in the work force

By RYAN CORMIER
The News Journal
08/28/2004

A typical day for full-time University of Delaware student Michael Clark goes something like this:

At 10 a.m. he's at his first class for the day. Next, with hardly a break, he heads off for work at Iron Hill Restaurant & Brewery, where he waits tables from late afternoon into the night. He's home by 11 p.m., giving him time for a few hours of studies before getting to bed around 2 a.m.

Within hours, it will be time for his 16-hour day to start again.

Facing a full load of classes and 30 hours of work each week, Clark isn't alone on college campuses in Delaware and around the country. Rising tuition costs and the increasing need for high-tech educational and recreational gear are making it more likely that today's full-time students are trying to combine the demands of a job with the pressures of school.

It's a juggling feat that can make students more likely to miss classes, let grades suffer and put their future careers at risk, experts say, but it's also an experience that some contend can make them better students and prepare them more thoroughly for a post-college world.

"There are benefits for working some and there is harm from working too much. There is a tipping point where more work starts to create problems," said Jonathan Orzag, director of Sebago Associates, a Washington D.C.-based economic consulting firm. Orzag authored an in-depth study on working students.

Over the past 30 years, the number of college students working part time has steadily risen from 38 percent in 1970 to 51 percent in 2001, according to Post Secondary Opportunity, a public policy analysis group. Over the four years of a typical college career, 77 percent of students have worked during a portion of their college career, according to the American Council on Education.

Experts say the trend is directly tied to skyrocketing costs of college, especially in an age where students are expected to have ready access to computers and Internet access.

"That's a driving factor here," Orzag said.

From 1994 to 2004, the annual cost of tuition and fees at four-year public schools jumped nearly 50 percent to \$4,694, after adjustment for inflation, according to the College Board, a nonprofit association that tracks college pricing.

At Peace-A-Pizza in Newark, general manager John Dinan receives about 150 inquiries about jobs at the beginning of each semester from students looking to fill one of his 17 part-time positions, all held students. "We have a great pool here," he said. "It's to the point where you almost have to know someone here to get a job."

'Must-have' spending

Not all of those prospective workers are taking jobs just to stay in school. "The need for discretionary money has also driven students to work," Orzag said. At today's colleges, that cash is needed for more than just concert tickets and pizzas. Items once considered luxuries in a dorm room - such as cell phones, DVD players, televisions and video consoles - are on many modern students' "must-have" lists.

Even when their financial needs are not pressing, some students feel compelled to work, and some parents believe it's a solid lesson. Though 18-year-old UD freshman Greg Newman has worked since he was 12, he and his mother Carol decided he should hold off on getting a job until after his first semester.

Once he's settled in, she thinks a job will be good for him. Not only will he earn money and learn job skills, but it will cut down on his free time. If he doesn't get a job, "he might party more than he would; he might get lazy."

UD junior Christine Graeber is secretly looking forward to working at Peace-A-Pizza this



The News Journal/BOB HERBERT

University of Delaware student Michael Clark works 30 hours a week at the Iron Hill Restaurant & Brewery in Newark. Here, he serves (from left) Jay Sarandrea, Randy Redick and Jeff Scioli.



The News Journal/BOB HERBERT

UD's Kate Cordrey limits her work at Grass Roots so she can focus on school. As a freshman, she said she worked too much.

TIPS FOR BALANCING WORK AND CLASS

Assign priorities

Learn how to schedule and plan your time efficiently

Determine when you do your best work, i.e. whether you are a morning or night person

Learn to control interruptions like not answering telephones

Avoid getting over-committed and be realistic about what can be accomplished

Avoid procrastination

Source: University of Delaware, Center for Counseling and Student Development

semester. Her parents had funded her first two years so she could focus exclusively on classes. This year, they have cut off funding for gas, utilities and spending money. She will be working up to three nights a week, giving up one of her weekend nights.

"It will be something other than school work to keep me busy," said Graeber, who said she had felt a bit guilty lounging around when her friends and roommates had to go off to work.

"I felt bad because I was the only one of my friends who didn't have a job," the 20-year-old from Dover said. "They would say, 'Well, I have to go to work,' and I was like, 'Sucks to be you.' "

Some work helps grades

Studies have shown that a certain amount of work outside of school actually improves grade point averages for students, in addition to earning them the average \$7.50 an hour they get paid. Orzag said students working one to 20 hours a week had a higher GPA than students who didn't work. But once the hours exceeded 20 hours and went up to 40, the GPAs fell below the average of those not employed.

There is even research contending that working students are more focused and efficient in their studies, and some point out that students' work experience could help them in the labor market after graduation.

At Klondike Kates restaurant in Newark, Meghan Hartzell sees her 20-hour-per-week job as a hostess and waitress not only as a moneymaker but an aid in keeping focused. "The busier I am, the better I am at managing my time," Hartzell said.

Still, the students must find a way to balance two highly demanding responsibilities at an already stressful time of life. In order to succeed, time management is key, said John Bishop, head of UD's Center for Counseling and Student Development.

In his 28 years working at the center, he has seen more and more students take on jobs in addition to their studies. "It's a trade-off students acknowledge they are making," Bishop said. "The only thing that's not negotiable is that there's only 168 hours a week. You need to work within that time frame."

According to U.S. Department of Education research, working during college does not mean a student is more likely to have academic problems or drop out. For three years, the department tracked working and nonworking students who began their college career during the 1995-96 academic year.

the spring of 1998, students who worked were less likely to have graduated, but were just as likely to be still enrolled in classes. The study also found students who work and those who did not were equally as likely to drop out without earning a degree.

Finding a balance

But not every student can balance their schedules when one earns them money and the other doesn't.

UD junior Kate Cordrey limits herself to 10 to 15 hours of work a week so she can focus on school. Some of her friends don't have that much self-control.

"They work 40 hours a week but they never go to class," she said. "They're always sleeping."

Cordrey said it took her a few months before striking a balance as a freshman with a job. She soon found that she was working too much.

"It was pretty hard. Just getting to class alone was hard," she said. "I was busy all the time and I didn't have any time beyond working and studying."

Orzag said the most surprising finding from his 2001 study was that full-time students who also work full time doubled from 1985 to 2000 from 5.6 percent to 10.4 percent.

"It's a really shocking, disconcerting and troubling trend," he said. "For many students, they have no choice. They have to work 30 or 40 hours a week or else they can't afford college or their housing."

At Delaware State University, Germaine Scott-Cheatham, director of the School of Management's advisement center, knows firsthand the challenges of juggling class and work. She did it herself when she was an undergraduate and still does it now while she works towards a master's degree at Wilmington College.

The 38-year-old single parent of three said she has no problem relating to what her students are going through when she advises them about work and school.

"There were times when I was doing it and thought, 'Why am I doing this,' " Scott-Cheatham said. "You have to have that inner drive to get whatever that brass ring is that you want."

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