

# Research Briefs

## KEY FINDINGS

- 21% higher 3-yr graduation rate for students employed on campus.
- .22 higher cumulative GPA for students employed on campus.
- 14% higher 1st fall to 2nd fall retention for students employed on campus.
- Most student workers were not employed on campus their first semester.
- On-campus employment appears to impact long-term outcomes more profoundly than short term.

## IMPLICATIONS

### For Practice:

- Assess current methods for hiring student workers.
- Develop innovative strategies and easy-to-use procedures for supervisors/administrators to promote hiring students first for more college jobs.

### For Policy:

- Review college policies to remove barriers to hiring students.
- Promote student-first hiring policies where possible.

### For Research:

- Expand research to control for other factors related to student successes.



## Student On-Campus Employment Status: A Comparison of Differences in Re-enrollment, Final Cumulative GPA, and 3 Year Graduation Rate

Finding innovative ways to help students progress from community college enrollment through rigorous course work and on to the completion of a degree or certificate is the bulk of our work here at South Texas College (STC). Prompted by a host of encouraging findings in recent literature, STC researchers recently began a preliminary study of student performance data broken into groups based on whether the students had also been employed at the college at sometime during their college career. Findings indicate statistically significant differences between performances of students who worked on campus compared to those who did not in graduation rates, cumulative GPA, and retention (re-enrollment).

### Background

Student engagement on campus and with their curriculum is a hot topic when educators are seeking to find ways to help students to succeed in their educational goals. Many studies in scholarly literature have shown students who work on campus are more likely to succeed. Researchers from the University of Minnesota took it a bit further and found that high levels of student engagement were associated with either full parental support or if a student must work, it was best to be working on campus. "Other characteristics associated with campus involvement suggest a pattern of circumstantial limitations. Those who were not at all or only slightly involved worked more, had greater loan and credit card debt, were more likely to be employed off campus, less likely to be employed on campus, more likely to be commuter students and less likely

to have parental support as their main way to pay college expenses (all significant  $p < .01$ )." *Student Involvement and Satisfaction*, University of Minnesota, Matross (2009), p. 3.

In this study we are asking whether our students who work on campus are more likely to graduate than other students. We would like to see similar findings to the Minnesota study. "The challenge for the University (of Minnesota) is how to further engage students in campus life, both academic and extra-curricular. Our data would suggest that more grant money, more campus jobs, and more encouragement of on-campus housing would all help reduce barriers to involvement."

### Methodology

The data for this study came from the College's BANNER student information system. We started with the full-time first-time-in-college (FT-FTIC) students on the CBM001 files submitted to the Texas Higher Ed-

ucation Coordinating Board (THECB) which make up the graduation rate cohorts. Fall 2005, 2006, and 2007 cohorts were included in the study (Fall 2007 is the most recent graduation rate cohort for which the 3-year graduation rate is available). Using employee data in BANNER, we identified each student in the cohorts as student employee during the first Fall semester (Yes/No), during the first academic year (Yes/No), and any time during the 3-years (Yes/No). The number of semesters a student was employed or continuous employment were not taken into consideration at this time. Employment categories included were direct wage (DW) and work study (WS). Additionally, graduation, re-enrollment, and GPA at the time of graduation were obtained from BANNER as well to make comparisons between FT-FTIC students who were also student employees and those who were not.

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### Research Questions

Research questions were formulated around commonly used higher education outcomes measures:

1. Do FT-FTIC students who are also student employees in their first Fall semester have higher first fall to first spring retention rate?
2. Do FT-FTIC students who are also student employees in their first academic year have higher first fall to second fall retention rate?
3. Do FT-FTIC students who are also student employees any time in their first three academic years have higher 3-year graduation rate?
4. Do FT-FTIC students who are also student employees any time in their first three academic years have higher GPA's at the time of graduation?

### Findings

**Re-enrollment (Persistence or Retention):** First fall to first spring retention rates are virtually the same

for FT-FTIC students who were also student employees in their first fall semester and those who were not (83.3% and 84.6% for the Fall 2007 cohort). One has to note that very few students are employed on campus during their first semester (19, 24, and 12, respectively, for fall 2005, 2006, and 2007 cohorts).

When first fall to second fall retention rates are compared, larger proportions of on campus employed students re-enroll (75.5% vs. 61.8% for the Fall 2007 cohort).

**Cumulative Grade Point Average (Cum GPA) at Final Semester:** At the end of their graduation term, students who were employed on campus earned significantly higher cumulative GPA's than their counterparts (3.31 vs. 3.09 for the Fall 2007 cohort).

**3 Year Graduation Rate:** The graduation rate used in this study is the percent of total cohort who graduated within 3 years with a certificate or an associate degree. This study reveals that FT-FTIC students who have on campus employment are more likely to graduate within three years (36.8% vs. 16.1% for the Fall 2007 cohort).

### Implications for Further Research

The initial findings from this study support the notion that students who work on campus are more likely to graduate than other students. In fact, on-campus employment appears to impact more profoundly long-term outcomes, such as 3-year graduation rate and cumulative GPA at graduation, than short term outcomes, such as first fall to first spring and to second fall retention rates. However, we suspect that this may be due to small numbers of students who are employed on campus from the first Fall on. Foremost, we would like to take other factors into account that may have a moderating effect on the relationship between on-campus employment and 3-year graduation rate and other outcome measures investigated in this study (not limited to but including self-selection, not employed or being employed elsewhere, age, gender, number of semesters or continuous employment, etc.).

STC is already exploring strategies for increasing the number of student employees and would be wise to expand this idea. For example, in the graduate on time (GOT) program planned for Fall 2011, STC plans to implement a learn and work strategy. Discussions to develop the staffing plan and to secure funds are being undertaken by the GOT program committee. Further studies are needed to confirm the link between on-campus employment and student success.

THECB Graduation Cohort	Fall 2005 (n=1440)		Fall 2006 (n=1981)		Fall 2007 (n=1984)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1st Fall to 1st Spring Retention <sup>1</sup>	73.7%	83.9%	87.5%	81.0%	83.3%	84.6%
1st Fall to 2nd Fall Retention <sup>2</sup>	58.9%	59.8%	74.6%***	58.1%	75.5%*	61.8%
Cum GPA at final semester	3.27*	3.10	3.25**	3.08	3.31***	3.09
3 Yr Grad Rate (THECB)	25%***	9.7%	33.6%***	12.4%	36.8%***	16.1%
Total cohort ever employed	116	1024	107	1874	117	1867

**Notes:** Student Workers include Work Study (WS) and Direct Wage (DW) categories.

Retention: Only students employed their *first Fall semester* <sup>1</sup> or their *first full year* <sup>2</sup> were counted as "Yes" for retention calculations (re-enrolled or graduated).

Significant differences are indicated by: \*\*\* .01, \*\* .05, \* .10.