Will Work For a College Education: An Analysis of the Role Employment Plays in the Experiences of First-Year College Students

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College students across the United States struggle with the challenges of balancing work and school. In 2005, 29.5% of full-time students worked over 20 hours a week while attending college, with 70.1% of their part-time counterparts in the workplace for 20 or more hours each week (NCES, 2005). Given the reality of work for college students, higher education researchers and educators must recognize that students work for a variety of reasons and need to consider how this phenomenon impacts students' lives. In an effort to foster such considerations, the authors explored college students' attitudes about working while in college and found that students from different social class backgrounds apply different meanings to the role of work in their lives. Bourdieu's (1977a, 1984, 1993) ideas of social capital, habitus, and taste provide a conceptual framework to examine the findings. Recommendations are provided for student affairs professionals based on data and results.

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I always worry about money. And I try hard to keep my grades up
so I won't lose my scholarship money. (Emily, first-year college
student)

My roommate knows that if he doesn't have a job he will not
be able to go to college anymore. He can't do it. And [for me]
it's more like, "Well, if I don't have a job, I can go off my bank
a little bit, and if I run out there, my parents will like pick it up
... if it's really necessary." It's [knowing my parents can support
me financially] like a security blanket that I have and he doesn't.
(Adam, first-year college student)

College students across the United States struggle with the challenges
of balancing employment and school. According to a recent report (National
Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2005) 29.5% of students who
are enrolled full-time are employed over 20 hours a week while in college,
while 70.1% of their part-time counterparts are in the workplace for 20
or more hours each week. Given that a majority of undergraduates are
employed, higher education researchers and educators should consider the
ways in which employment affects students' college experiences. In an
effort to increase this understanding, this study explored college students'
attitudes about working while in college. We embarked on the study
hypothesizing that these attitudes would be different for students from
different social class backgrounds, and hoped to clarify these variations in
ways that would be useful to persons working with college students.

Three questions guided our study: 1) Why do college students work
while pursuing their educational goals? 2) What is the role of employment
in students' lives? 3) How can those working to assist college students in
navigating employment, school, and life better serve the needs of employed
students? Our intent was to develop a deeper understanding of the reasons
why students are employed, and to provide suggestions for practitioners
related to the growing number of working students in higher education
institutions.

A summary of the literature related to college students and
employment contextualizes our study. Following this summary, we use
Bourdieu's (1977b, 1984, 1993) concepts of social class reproduction to
lay the study's theoretical foundation. Next, students' voices are presented

to inform the guiding questions. Finally, based on our findings, we offer recommendations for meeting the unique needs of working students.

College Students and Employment

Researchers exploring college students and work have found that employment impacts campus social involvement, academic performance, and persistence (Alford, 1998; Astin, 1975; Beeson & Wessel, 2002; Hey, Calderon, & Seabert, 2003; Walpole, 2003). The debate surrounding the impact of employment on college students' experiences can be summarized according to two schools of thought. Scholars subscribing to the first argue that working while in college can benefit students. Both on-campus and part-time employment, defined as fewer than 20 hours per week, have been shown to provide students with opportunities for faculty interaction and on-campus involvement (Beeson & Wessel; Elling & Furr, 2002). Working part-time on-campus helped students develop a sense of belonging and a feeling of community engagement (Hey, Calderon, & Seabert, 2003). Moreover, Astin found that students who worked part-time on-campus were more likely to persist to degree completion.

Persons who adhere to the other school of thought contend that working students face issues that can lead them to feel overworked and overwhelmed. Hey, Calderon, and Seabert (2003) found that some working students had elevated stress levels leading to increased anxiety. Additionally, work, particularly off-campus employment, can inhibit opportunities for on-campus involvement and integration into the campus community (Hey et al., 2003). Students working off-campus were less likely to interact with faculty, missing opportunities to create vital relationships shown to influence college persistence (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993). Walpole (2003) and Alford (1998) examined how employment and social class were related to college student persistence. Walpole found that working class students had less time for campus involvement as well as significantly less time to study. These findings were echoed by Alford who reported that the high value placed on employment by working class students prohibited them from participating academically and socially in campus life.

In their 2006 review of literature related to the effect of employment on college students' experiences, Riggert, Boyle, Petrosko, Ash, and Rude-Parkins noted that the research remains complex and inconclusive. One confounding issue was the variety of student populations studied at a large range of institutional types. These researchers argued that smaller, qualitative, descriptive studies involving homogeneous populations might

deepen our understanding of the issues. The current study responds to this call.

Social Class Analysis

Conley (1999) argued that "the socioeconomic endowments that each child brings to the educational system powerfully predict that individual's chances for academic success" (p. 55). For the purpose of this paper, an individual's social class background includes socioeconomic endowments described by Conley, including parent education and occupation, family income, and a notion of wealth derived from an individual's extended family resources and home ownership. Individual factors that comprise social class status, such as parent education and income, have been found to predict the likelihood of entering college, and are also related to college persistence (Antonio & Horvat, 2002; McDonough, 1997; Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, & McDonough, 2004). Including a student's social class in the analysis of students' attitudes toward employment and the subsequent effects employment has on their college experiences, may reveal important differences between students who are employed because of financial necessity and those who choose to be employed. Bourdieu's (1977b, 1984, 1993) ideas of capital, habitus, and taste frame our study.

Bourdieu's (1977b, 1984, 1993) definition of capital forms the basis of this analysis. Capital is a form of power in a given environment. There are three types of capital: economic, social, and cultural. Economic capital includes resources with monetary value, and influences students' college experiences, from constraining choice of college based on cost, perceived benefit and availability of aid to driving the need to be employed while in college. Swartz (1997) noted that economic capital provides individuals with the time and ability to accumulate cultural capital: those who have the economic means can afford to spend time developing and accumulating cultural capital. This is clear in Walpole (2003) and Alford's (1998) studies: students who worked to obtain capital had less time for campus social involvement and academics, both of which contribute to the development of social and cultural capital. In the following descriptions of social and cultural capital, it becomes clear that these other forms of capital have a great deal of value in the higher education environment. Students who do not have the economic freedom to develop these types of capital are at a disadvantage in the higher education setting.

Social capital derives from individual networks or connections. Social capital interacts with economic capital in the process of accumulating cultural capital. According to Bourdieu (1993), economic capital

"provides the conditions for freedom from economic necessity" (p. 68), which, when accompanied by social capital, allows individuals the time and connections necessary to invest in the accumulation of cultural capital. Social capital impacts students' knowledge of educational choices and how they gather information (McDonough, 1997). For example, in a wealthy, college-educated family, potential students are exposed to extensive higher education options. They, their families, and their peers have a better understanding of the college admissions process and are aware of scholarships and financial aid options. Relationships with others who understand the arena of higher education place students with social capital at an advantage on a college campus.

Cultural capital represents an individual's societal status and knowledge, and plays a role in educational success in that it can consist of students' knowledge of subject matter, understanding of the dominant culture, and views of college as more than an academic activity. Cultural capital legitimates an individual's power. Cultural capital influences how students "fit" – the extent to which students perceive their experiences, interests, and values match those of the campus environment. Both social and cultural capital are influenced by economic capital, which provides individuals with the time and ability to accumulate social and cultural capital (Swartz, 1997). The result is that students who are employed for economic reasons may miss out on opportunities for engagement in college life.

It is important to note that while working class students do bring cultural and social capital to campus it is often not valued by the institution in the same way as is the capital of upper- and middle-class students. For example, students who understand that creating networks is one aspect of the college experience are supported by an institution's efforts to encourage students to socialize with each other. Higher education institutions, such as Mountain College, that have an emphasis on this element of the college experience make assumptions about how students understand the benefits of a college education. Further, the cultural and social capital of the institution itself, which is determined by its place within the hierarchy of higher education institutions, is reflected in the institution's expectations and assumptions regarding what kind of capital a student brings to campus (e.g., assumptions on a community college campus would be different from those at a highly-selective institution) (Berger, 2000). The fact that institutions value certain types of capital over others reflects Bourdieu's (1977b) argument that educational systems serve to reproduce the existing social order.

The second key Bourdieuean concept is habitus (1977b), defined as "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which… functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (pp. 82-83). An individual's habitus is shaped by and interacts with that person's capital to influence choices. Habitus shapes choices that members of a particular group see as available to them, thus influencing their decisions on a subconscious level. Social group members do not perceive that they have options beyond those typically open to those in their group. McDonough's (1997) study of college choice illustrates this process. Families, friends, schools, and socioeconomic status contributed to her participants' habitus, shaping perceived college options. Those from lower social class groups self-selected away from competitive, prestigious, and costly choices, regardless of their academic abilities. Their sense of where they fit was shaped by their habitus. It is important to note that these "choices" are, for the most part, unconscious. In fact, Swartz (1997) noted that within the notion of habitus, "educational choices are dispositional rather than conscious, rational calculations" (p. 197).

Finally, taste is an extension of habitus which impacts individual action. Bourdieu (1984) suggests two types of taste: taste for freedom and taste for necessity. Taste is largely defined by the amount of economic capital an individual possesses. Essentially, those with little economic capital lead lives focused on procuring essential needs. The taste for necessity develops from a habitus in which a person faces "directly and continuously the practical needs and urgencies of making a living" (Swartz, 1997, p. 167). In contrast to the taste for necessity is the taste for freedom characteristic of individuals from upper social classes. Bourdieu (1984) noted that the taste for freedom is, in fact, a lifestyle. The difference between taste for necessity and taste for freedom can be compared to the process of selecting clothing. Individuals who have no concern for the economic cost can select clothing that reflects their style, provides a level of comfort, or bears some prestige in terms of its branding. On the other hand, those who must attend to the cost of the clothing first will find their choices constrained and perhaps limited so that the cost and mere functionality of the garment become the primary choice factors. As taste is largely determined by economic resources, it is possible for individuals with a taste for freedom to choose to constrain their choices by limiting their spending. However, for someone with the taste for necessity, the constraints are not optional as they determine what choices are made.

Bourdieu and Waquant (1992) point out that American society is prone to denying the existence of taste differences. However, Bourdieu (1984) argues that the ways in which groups and preferences are classified in the

United States reveal a hierarchical order demonstrating that social position and cultural tastes are related. In education, this is illustrated by institutions considered the most prestigious charging higher tuition than community colleges, which are largely accessible to students without economic capital. The hierarchy also reflects how social and cultural capital are necessary to compete in the application process of highly-selective institutions, in which students who have access to private counselors, family networks, and test preparation courses are highly advantaged over those who do not. In this study we apply the notion of taste to students' reasons for working, and to their understanding of the role employment plays in their lives.

Methods

"The power of a qualitative presentation lies in the words of the participants and the analysis of the researcher" (Morrow & Smith, 2000, p. 200). This qualitative study focused on understanding how students made meaning of their experiences. An emphasis on the creation of meaning takes into account both conceptual and emotional frames used by students to make sense of their life experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) in developing an understanding of the "meaning-perspectives of the particular actors in the particular events" (Erickson, 1986, p. 121). Descriptive studies are powerful because they extend beyond an attempt to quantify characteristics for the purpose of predicting success or failure, and delve into the complexities of this process (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). With its focus and emphasis on students' perspectives and experiences, our study required a qualitative approach.

Further, the use of a Bourdieuean framework provides justification for a qualitative research methodology. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), viewing social phenomena from this perspective requires the ability to combine both structural and constructivist approaches. Specifically, Bourdieu and Wacquant argued for illuminating "objective structures" (p. 11), such as the distribution of limited resources, as well as exploring the experiences of agents functioning within those structures to illustrate the "categories of perception and appreciation" (p. 11) that shape their actions within those structures. A qualitative exploration of individual student experiences within the field of higher education would help produce an analysis that explored both the larger structures and the actions and perceptions of the students functioning within those structures.

Study Site

This study is one component of a larger qualitative study on college student socialization. Sixteen first-year college students were selected from

the entering class at a regional, private, liberal arts college in the West. Mountain College enrolls about 2,200 students annually, representing over 30 U.S. states and 30 countries worldwide. Its racial/ethnic diversity mirrors the local community, with students of color comprising less than 10% of the student population. Over 90% of Mountain College students receive financial aid packages that are both federally and institutionally funded. The College is located in an urban setting and has a clearly stated goal of building campus community. Mountain College was selected as our study site for two reasons. First, the community focus and small size of the campus would create an environment in which members of the College would affect students' lives in a way that persons within a larger, commuter-based institution could not. Due to our interest in college student socialization, this personalized, community focus was key to understanding how students perceived their fit on campus. Second, because of the College's high financial support for students, we could select an economically diverse sample, despite the fact that Mountain's tuition levels were among the highest in its state.

Participants

We invited all entering students to participate in the study via letters sent the summer before they enrolled in college. Thirty-two students responded affirmatively, completing a short demographic questionnaire. Using the data from the demographic questionnaires, we purposively selected 16 participants who lived on campus and were full-time, traditional-aged students because they represented a population experiencing the College's institutional community building efforts (i.e., improving on-campus housing, developing a comprehensive student life program, incorporating service learning into the curriculum) to the greatest degree, which would allow us to examine how social class differences impacted this experience. Additionally, in an effort to create maximum diversity within the sample, the 16 participants were selected to reflect a balance of gender, race/ ethnicity, social class status, choice of major, and state of permanent residence. Thirteen students completed the study; three withdrew due to personal time constraints. Table 1 illustrates the gender, racial/ethnic, and academic major demographic characteristics of the final sample.

Social Class

Conley (1999) urges the inclusion of measurements of wealth in determining social class. Traditional measurements of socioeconomic status (SES) which include education, occupation, and family income ignore the impact that wealth resources have on a person's economic

background. For example, when their parents own a home it is easier for students to receive college loans. Another measure of wealth, the financial resources of extended family, may create an economic safety net. To determine the social class of our participants, we considered traditional measures of SES and these two additional measurements of wealth. An outline of participants' social class statuses is provided in Table 2.

Table 1. *Participant Characteristics*

Name	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Academic major
Adam	M	White	Aviation
Anna	F	Latina	Education
Casey	M	White	Math
Emily	F	White	Business
Grant	M	White	Psychology
Jen	F	Indonesian	Pre-Law
Jessica	F	White	English
Joe	M	Korean	Pre-Med
Lou	F	White	Political Science
Mike	M	White	Theatre
Nette	F	White	Biology
Phi	M	Chinese	Business
Whitney	F	White	Accounting

To determine the social class status of each participant, we examined their family income, parent education, parent occupation (with professional describing white-collar jobs), whether the family owned their own home, and the extended family resources of the students' families. By looking at measures beyond parental income and education, we could illustrate nuances that might affect students' attitudes toward work while in college. The first step was to evaluate family income. Students whose family incomes were below $25,000 were categorized as working class; incomes in the $26,000-75,000 range were considered middle class; and incomes above $75,000 were upper class. We then looked at parental occupational status, home ownership, and extended family resources to see how these augmented or mediated the classification based solely on income. Some students' families had high incomes, but other determinants resulted in a working class designation. One example of this is Casey, whose father works in construction. Casey's mother has a limited college education,

but his father has never been to college. His family owns their own home, but extended family resources are very limited, meaning that other family members cannot be relied upon for financial support in difficult times. Because of these determinants, we defined Casey as working class, despite his family income of over $76,000 annually.

Jessica is another interesting participant. Jessica's father died when she was very young. Both of her parents have college degrees, and her mother works part-time in the local elementary school as a specialist. Her family owns their own home and her family resources are extensive. In fact, Jessica referred to herself as a "trust-fund kid," as her grandparents and aunts and uncles contributed to her college education. Accordingly, we designated Jessica as middle class even though her family income was just over $26,000 a year. The categories we determined for participants reflect a holistic picture of their economic resources and, in terms of the education levels of parents and parental occupation, feed into Bourdieu's concepts of taste (1984) and habitus (1977b) described above.

Data Collection and Analysis

We interviewed participants seven times during their first year of college. Interviews were semi-structured, beginning with broad questions about students' college experiences before focusing on specific aspects of those experiences. Students were often asked about their employment, including queries regarding why they did or did not work, how often and where they worked, how employment affected their lives on campus, and whether they believed employment had any effect on their academic performance. Even when we did not ask students to talk specifically about their employment, those who were employed consistently discussed employment-related issues as relevant to their college experiences, indicating that for these students, employment was a salient part of their lives. Participants also wrote seven journal responses to general queries posed by the researchers over the course of the year, many of which provided additional data regarding their perspectives on employment. At the end of the year, students participated in a focus group from which emerging themes were explored and clarified. Elements from all of these data sources were used to answer the research questions posed in this paper.

Data were analyzed continuously using analytic induction as outlined by Erickson (1986). We began by reviewing the data, individually reading interview and journal transcripts and identifying all participant comments related to employment. We then sought linkages between the comments to organize them into broader thematic groups. At this point, we compared

Table 2. *Social Class Status Determinants*

Student	Family income	Parental education	Parental occupation status	Home ownership	Extended family resources	Social class
Anna	Below $25,000	Mom college	Blue collar	Yes	Limited	Working class
Nette	Below $25,000	Both college	Not employed	Yes	Limited	Working class
Phi	Below $25,000	No college	Blue collar	Yes	Limited	Working class
Cake	$26,000-50,000	No college	Professional	No	Limited	Working class
Mike	$26,000-50,000	Some college	Blue collar	Yes	Limited	Working class
Joe	$51,000-75,000	No college	Blue collar	No	Limited	Working class
Casey	$76,000-100,000	Some college	Blue collar	Yes	Limited	Working class
Emily	$26,000-50,000	Both college	Professional	Yes	Extensive	Middle class
Grant	$51,000-75,000	Both college	Professional	Yes	Limited	Middle class
Jessica	$26,000-50,000	Both college	Professional	Yes	Extensive	Middle class
Whitney	$101,000-125,000	No college	Professional	Yes	Extensive	Upper class
Adam	$150,000-175,000	Both college	Professional	Yes	Extensive	Upper class
Lou	Over $200,000	Dad college	Professional	Yes	Extensive	Upper class

our individually identified themes, working together to further clarify the five primary themes that emerged from the data. After these themes were refined, we analyzed the data again, using Bourdieu's (1984) concept of tastes for freedom and necessity as our theoretical lens. Themes that supported Bourdieu's ideas were noted, as well as discrepant cases. While Bourdieu's constructs framed the analysis, care was taken to allow students' voices to define the emergent themes.

Results

Regardless of social class background, employment was a salient issue for all but one of the students in the study. After reviewing the many comments students made about employment, we organized the data into five general themes: (1) I need the money, (2) work as a security blanket, (3) juggling work, school, and life, (4) views on the work of others, and (5) the impact of employment on students' experiences. According to Erickson (1986), the role of the qualitative researcher is to present the meanings of participants' everyday lives in such a way that abstract theoretical concepts are grounded in experience. The students' words paint a compelling picture of how they view employment in relation to their college experiences.

I Need the Money

Several students talked about needing money as the main reason they were employed. Anna, a working-class student who worked 25 to 30 hours a week off-campus at a Wendy's Restaurant, noted, "The money thing's a big deal. Because I'm going to be a teacher and I have to look ahead to the future. I can't afford to pay 90 million dollars in student loans – to be paying back for the rest of my life." Anna's need for money took her off-campus because she believed the work-study jobs available on campus did not meet her economic needs. Mike, a working- class student employed at two off-campus locations, echoed Anna's sentiment, "I decided at the beginning I could make a lot more money if I didn't work on campus." However, later in the year, as he struggled to juggle his many responsibilities, Mike added, "Now I realize it would have been a lot easier [to work on campus] and they [employers at Mountain College] have some jobs here that are okay." Mike and Anna found that their off-campus jobs detracted from their academic and social endeavors on campus.

Grant's middle-class family included four college students, so he was constantly looking for ways to assist his parents financially, which included working on campus. Midway through the year, he talked about becoming a resident advisor (RA): "I think it might be hard to pay for college next year. So, if I was an RA it would help because it's free room and board and

food and stuff like that." Like Grant, Mike focused on the job that would provide the most economic capital. He told us, "I like the Disney store, but the restaurant pays more so I have to stay with that one." Emily summed up her situation: "I work at Cinemark Movies 10 right over there. It's not fun, but it earns money." For these students, the issue was not enjoying their jobs, but the economic return on their employment.

Work as a Security Blanket

Other students referred to employment as a way to provide some sort of security blanket; not something they needed, but something that made them feel good. This security took a variety of forms. Some students considered their employment as creating security for the future and strategically chose their place of employment based upon the opportunity for developing networks and relationships, while others used the money gained from their employment for activities and entertainment. One example of this perspective was Phi:

> I want to be making honest money. I mean, I like money from my parents, but, you know, I'm perfectly capable of like having my own income and getting my income. Like if I work for one or two days during the week, so I'll have enough for social things.

Adam talked about adding work during his second semester: "I'm going to try to work – pays some gas money, or flight time." Casey's job fed his passion for rock climbing: "I've got a job. I work one hour a week. I don't get paid. I get a free membership to Rockreation."

Employment provided some students with security as they had opportunities to build networks and relationships. For Lou, this was the primary reason for working in the college president's office:

> It [working for the college president] will be a nice way for me to start to get to know the administration really well, and a lot of power lies in there. Like, if you can – if you know these people, you can get a good reputation.

Nette's campus job in the biology lab provided her with a peer group: "And, all the other work studies, like, we have our little – we always eat dinner together and do stuff on weekends." Finally, Jen, who worked for the communications department on campus, added:

> What would be very nice is if I could get a job off-campus over the weekend, maybe, like at a bookstore, or a coffee shop. Once I have my sense of the city, and maybe make some connections with that, I'd love to do that.

Jen, who came to Mountain from out of state, was looking for a break from campus where she spent most of her time.

One notable difference between students who worked primarily for economic reasons and those for whom employment filled a more social role was the notion of liking their employment. Emily, Anna, Grant, and Mike all mentioned working at jobs they did not particularly enjoy. Anna's comments illustrate this case: "I'm just sick of working with hamburgers. Anyway, I'm just tired of the job. Tired of the people – it's too stressful." On the other hand, Phi, Nette, and Lou told us they would not work at a job they did not like. For example, Lou noted: "And, I would have, I mean, I wouldn't work for seven dollars and fifty cents an hour, because I think I'm worth at least $8.00." The students who needed to be employed to remain in college felt pressure to stay in their jobs. None of them talked about looking for a job that would lead to connections and relationships, or that would provide security for their future. Another interesting difference in students' approaches toward employment is evident in how they viewed the challenge of juggling these different roles.

Juggling Work, School, and Life

All of the working students talked about the challenges of juggling work, school, and life, regardless of employment location. Jen's comment is illustrative:

> It was just like I'd wake up and the first thing I'd do is go to work and then go straight to classes, and then by the time you could study it's already – you know, the library's already closed or something like that.

Anna's employment was driven by economic need, and she often talked about how much she had to do: "I work my butt off. It teaches me more discipline, because I have to manage my time. It's like, 'Okay, so I have to do my homework before I go to work.'" Lou, who worked primarily for what she called "financial security" and networking opportunities, also talked about juggling responsibilities:

> I work four hours on Mondays and Wednesdays, but I think I might have to cut back on those, because even though I do have a chance to get all my homework done and stuff, it's just like, it's a lot of extra stress to get to work and stuff. It's a lot harder than I thought it would be, but I think I will try to stick it out for a couple of weeks, and if it gets too rough, I'll cut back on my hours.

Casey added:

> I've always been the type to want to take care of myself, but I also know that if I go there and work, my school might suffer. I'm just going to work with my brother. I'm going to help him build tarps, so I'm not so worried about that, but I don't want to let these things get in the way of going to school.

Lou and Casey's financial situations provided the flexibility to cut back on the hours they worked, but for Anna, who worked for economic reasons, reducing her employment hours was not a realistic possibility. These three students' comments illuminate differences we observed regarding how students who had to be employed and those who chose to be employed viewed their employment commitments.

Views on the Work of Others

Several students discussed how their employment situations differed from the experiences of other students. Adam's quote at the beginning of this article is one example. Adam talks about how work provided security, but he also realized that this was not the case for his roommate. Jessica, whose tuition was paid from a trust fund, told us:

> Sometimes I do feel kind of like a rich, White girl. Sometimes, just because I'm not – especially when my roommate comes home from a five-six hour day of – she tutors little kids. And you know, sometimes I do feel guilty about that… like I should be struggling more, or working more, you know doing all this other stuff.

Adam and Jessica, joined by other students who did not work, or who worked for reasons other than money, showed evidence of empathy for those who had to be employed.

Anna's comments about the differences between her situation and that of her roommate reflect her perception of students who did not have to be employed: "She's like, 'Oh, I'll do my homework tomorrow sort of thing.' I don't have that kind of time, you know." Grant also talked about how his need for employment made him work harder in college: "I think my economic status has really kind of made me work harder, just because my parents are paying for like four people in college right now so I kind of have to work harder. It's hard work." Emily, who worked off-campus at the local movie theater, talked about what her life would be like if she didn't have to be employed: "I think it's good for me because if I didn't have a job, I'd probably just be sitting around and not getting anything done, and I find that with a job I have to structure my time and so I actually

get things done." These three students reflected a sense that those who did not need jobs did not have to work as hard in college as they did.

The Impact of Employment on Students' Experiences

We observed differences in students' rationales as to why they worked and the roles they assigned to employment in their lives. Some students were employed due to economic necessity while others wanted to be employed either for entertainment or relationship-building reasons. Students recognized differences between themselves and others. Some students talked about how their experiences on campus were impacted by their need or desire to be employed. It became clear that our participants' lives were affected by their employment status.

Like Walpole (2003) and Alford (1998), we recognized that students working off campus had less time for studying and social involvement. Anna indicated:

> I know I'm missing something. Because people go to activities while I'm at work, and I'm missing out on gaining friends and knowing other people. And they're like, 'We did this and everyone did that,' and I'm like, 'I didn't.' And it's just kind of hard to get to know people.

Mike had a rough time finding time to study while balancing two off-campus jobs with schoolwork and social life: "I realized that with the play, school, work, and personal laziness I truly overworked myself." Although researchers indicate that on-campus employment can be beneficial for students (Beeson & Wessel, 2002; Elling & Furr, 2002; Hey, Calderon et al., 2003), such employment can still take them away from some social involvement opportunities on campus. Emily vocalized this dilemma,

> They [the Resident Hall Association] hired bands and then they had a beach day, and they had it out in the quad, and so I could see it. And, I was like, 'They're having so much fun.' A low point is on weekends when everyone has something to do, and I have to stay around because I was working at the Res [resident] Desk.

On the other hand, Phi, Lou, Adam, Nette, Whitney, and Casey saw employment as enhancing their lives. Nette's group of work-study students in her major department filled both academic and social needs. Whitney, who worked because she "always had a job" commented:

> [Money] does make your experience here a little better, though. I think, if you do have that money background, because you don't

have to go out and get a job, and you don't have to have student loans. You don't have all those burdens weighing down on you, so you have more time to study and really focus on the whole college part of it – having fun, socializing, you know.

Academics and social connections were priorities for students who did not need to work.

Examining participant persistence in college, we observed differences according to students' rationales for working. By the end of the year, Anna and Mike planned to discontinue their enrollment at Mountain. Their decisions to leave were largely based upon the burden of working to stay in college. Emily and Grant were both exploring employment opportunities that would include tuition reimbursement or room and board so that they might be able to stay at Mountain. Conversely, Phi and Lou had been elected to student government offices, Jessica was the editor of the college literary magazine, Whitney had completed enough credits to be considered a junior, and Adam was spending more time with his floormates. Nette's group of work-study friends had secured research projects on which to work through the summer and into the following year; her scholarship and financial aid afforded her the freedom to develop these relationships while working on campus. Those who did persist acknowledged that not working, or working limited hours, provided them opportunities to create campus connections, which contributed to their decisions to stay at Mountain.

Discussion

Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of the taste for freedom and the taste of necessity help explain some of the differences between students' views of work. Those who had to be employed for economic reasons illustrate how individuals' habitus shapes their tastes: the students whose social class backgrounds required that they be employed illustrate the taste for necessity. This is particularly evident when considering the type of work they did and their reasons for working. Students who were not dependent on economic capital from their employment could choose jobs they liked, while students whose habitus dictated that they needed the money tended to stay in jobs they did not enjoy. For example, both Anna and Mike worked off campus in jobs they did not like because they provided higher incomes than on-campus jobs. Conversely, Nette, whose tuition was paid by scholarships and grants, worked on campus where she could develop ties to the institution. She told us, "I've made some really good friends and some really good connections, acquaintances, whatever. I really enjoy my job and all the people that I interact with and stuff."

Students were cognizant of their own tastes as well as those of their peers. Bourdieu (1984) argues that those who have one type of taste often view the tastes of others in a negative way. Anna often talked critically about students who had fancy cars, stereo equipment, and expensive wardrobes. She, Grant, and Emily implied that students who did not need to be employed were less motivated, even lazy when it came to school work. These students were proud that having to be employed forced them to apply themselves academically. On the other hand, the students who did not have to be employed often viewed those who did with empathy. They saw what their own situations allowed and often expressed accompanying feelings of guilt.

Tastes evolve from individual practice, which is based on habitus. Participants whom approached their employment as necessity were largely from working- and middle-class backgrounds. Those who reflected the taste for freedom tended to come from upper-class homes. Upper-class students' habiti impacted not only their views of employment, but the roles employment and school played in their lives. For example, Lou viewed college as a place to make friends and connections, while Anna saw college as a place to focus solely on her studies with little time for socializing. For those who came to college with more economic capital, their experiences provided an opportunity to try different ideas and behaviors. Employment was an element of these students' lives as long as it did not detract from their overall college experiences. Those with limited economic capital focused on the functionality of their experience, finding employment to meet their needs. In this instance, employment was a necessity that enabled them to stay in the place they had made for themselves. Common among these students was a sense that the members within the College did not value their focus on developing economic capital, which was made clear in the constant efforts of educators to engage students in activities that would increase their social and cultural capital. For those students whose tastes were based on necessity, this fostered a disconnect within the institutional environment.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study examined how students' attitudes toward the role of employment shaped their college experiences; our data provide insight into this issue. However, there are three limitations to consider. First, the study's participants were all traditional-aged students. As these students were not responsible for the financial support of dependents, many of them were able to rely on their parents for financial and emotional support, and all but Anna were working part-time. Future research should focus on

students whose financial responsibilities differ from our participants', as such students might reflect on employment in different ways. With the numbers of older students in higher education increasing (Hensley & Kinser, 2001), it is important to consider how these students understand the role of employment and its interactions with their campus experiences.

Second, the participants attended a private, liberal arts college, one of the more expensive institutions in the state. Their financial concerns may have been compounded by the cost of attending Mountain, although most of the students in this study received federal and/or institutional aid packages. Future research might address this limitation by including students from a variety of institutional types, or focusing on students attending a lower-cost institution.

Third, all of the students in this study lived on campus. At many institutions, such as Mountain College, the cost of on-campus housing is higher than that of living off campus. All of our participants chose to live on-campus, regardless of financial constraints. Some students who were not familiar with the Mountain city area selected on-campus housing to avoid having to locate housing in an unfamiliar environment. Others were encouraged by college representatives to live on campus to enhance their campus engagement. Future studies should include students who live off-campus as these individuals must also address paying rent and purchasing and preparing their own meals.

Finally, qualitative research is not meant to be generalized across populations and locations. Rather, the focus of a study such as this is to explore a phenomenon or question in depth. The findings of this study are important for those working to improve the experiences of college students. We encourage higher education professionals to examine our results and consider how they apply to their various institutional settings. We also challenge future researchers to examine these issues in different ways.

Recommendations and Conclusion

With increasing numbers of students coming to college with jobs, professionals in higher education institutions must consider the impact of employment on students' experiences. It is important for those who interact with students to understand how they perceive the role of employment in their lives. For many students, enrolling in college and focusing all of their attention and energy on academic coursework is not an option. These students, like many of those in this study, see employment as an essential element of being a college student. While they recognize that

they cannot participate on campus at the same level as their non-working peers, students who must be employed for economic reasons also realize that they face a different reality. The students in this study voiced this reality: their taste focused on working and studying as priorities with the social elements of college life viewed as luxuries. It is essential that those who work with college students understand this reality. Based upon our findings, we suggest several strategies that student affairs professionals may implement in order to assist working students in their efforts toward college graduation. While these ideas are not exhaustive, they are intended to generate discussion and facilitate movement toward a greater understanding of the needs of working college students.

One strategy that may support employed students is developing an understanding within higher education institutions that large numbers of college students are employed while in school (NCES, 2005). We must foster greater awareness of these students' obligations. Higher education professionals must recognize that working students (regardless of employment location) face challenges not encountered by students who do not work. The students in this study provide examples of how students who are employed have limited study time, must race to class before or after work, and are balancing studies, work, and other obligations. Additionally, student affairs professionals must endeavor to accommodate the erratic nature of working students' schedules. One way to accommodate these students' schedules is to provide access to critical student services through the creation of extended hours, during which essential campus departments such as financial aid, academic advising, and counseling centers open early or remain open late to facilitate access to their services.

A second way that student affairs professionals can assist working students is by changing the way we frame our discourse. For example, rather than trying to convince students to lighten their work schedules and take more classes, there should be greater emphasis on assisting students in balancing employment and academic responsibilities. Such an emphasis reflects a willingness by faculty and student affairs professionals' to value the different types of capital that students bring with them to college. Additionally, students often need a listening ear. Providing working students with access to counseling and career centers or other willing adult listeners at times and locations where they can be utilized would benefit them.

On-campus partnerships between various entities may also assist working students. As Hey et al. (2003) found, some working students experience elevated stress levels that can lead to dangerous behaviors,

including drug and alcohol usage, which can elevate rates of institutional departure. Several of our student participants confirmed this finding. Providing information regarding the importance of physical and mental health and ensuring that students know where to locate resources both on and off campus would support employed students in balancing the many facets of their lives.

A final strategy includes integrating students' employment with the learning process. This notion is illustrated in the philosophies of service-learning, internships, and cooperative education, which enable students to reflect, discuss, and create links between their personal lives and the world around them (Cipolle, 2004). Similar links can be established between workplaces and students' academic lives. For example, faculty might provide opportunities for students to use their workplaces as case studies for assignments. Students could be encouraged to apply concepts learned in the classroom to their work environment, with emphasis on such connections in coursework. In this manner, students could gather information for their studies while at work, blurring the distinctions between and competing demands of the two.

In this article, we illuminate some of the differences in college students' perceptions of employment, and how employment impacts their campus experiences. We provided those working with college students a deeper understanding of why students are employed and how they perceive the role of their employment in their lives as students. The above suggestions were derived from the findings of the study and are based on the fact that many students consider employment an integral and necessary part of the college experience. Rather than view employment as detrimental to their success in higher education, it is necessary for student affairs professionals to understand and validate students' needs for employment.

People who work within higher education institutions and student affairs units in particular are often asked about their student retention efforts. Given the debate on the effect of employment on college student retention, it is clear that more attention to this issue is necessary. By creating avenues for employed students to access services and make connections between employment and education, student affairs professionals can provide resources to increase the persistence and degree completion of working students.

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