

Career Services

Assessment of: 1) student response to part-time employment opportunities on campus; 2) the usefulness of the student employment website

ABSTRACT

To enhance departmental understanding of the benefits of part-time employment for UM students as well as improve our Student Employment website, Career Services surveyed The University of Montana's student employees to elicit their views regarding various aspects of the Student Employment process and website.

Ongoing evaluation and assessment initiatives are critical to ensure the relevance and efficacy of programs and services. This report documents Career Services' first formal assessment focusing on student employment.

The survey found that most UM student employees participated in part-time employment for financial reasons (93%); about half of student employees were working to help build their resumes (48%) or gain work experience and skills related to their major/career goals (45%); and about one quarter of student employees were using part-time employment for career exploration (22%) and to make closer connections on campus (24%). Major exploration and parental influence were reasons reported by 6% of student employees.

Most student employees (78%) worked between 5-20 hours, found that part-time work enhanced their time management skills (83%), and described the website as user-friendly (88%). Many students reported being able to find jobs that matched their interests/area of study (64%), found that working helped them define their career goals (63%), and felt working would make them more competitive in the job market after graduation (60%). Student employees were more evenly split on whether working part-time helped them stay in school financially (56%), wanted links to resume and cover letter writing on the website (56%), and thought employer evaluations would be helpful (53%). Only 39% of students were provided with employer evaluations.

Smaller percentages of students reported using the Temp Job (7%) or Griz-Tracker (11%) features on the website. Of those who did subscribe, 24% found the Temp Job feature helpful and 37% found Griz-Tracker feature helpful.

About 65% of respondents rated their overall satisfaction with the Student Employment website as either "very" or "somewhat" satisfied. Many of the respondents (35%) had suggestions and/or comments about their employment experiences, using the website, and potential improvements to the Student Employment process and website.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The mission of Career Services is to provide quality educational, career and life planning services to assist all students and alumni of the University achieve their personal and professional goals, both now and in the future. Toward this end, Career Services provides an array of services designed to support the academic mission of the University while also fostering the out-of-classroom development of the individual as it relates to the realistic setting and attainment of career and life goals. Career Services administers the Student Employment program, among others, in fulfillment of its mission.

The mission of the Student Employment Office is to assist students in finding meaningful work experiences aimed at providing financial support while complementing their college and career goals. The Student Employment Office assists the University and surrounding community businesses by developing partnerships that will allow students to earn money, expand their academic preparation, and to explore career objectives through a quality college work experience.

Career Services created the Student Employment program in 2002 to provide a centralized job posting system of part-time jobs for currently enrolled students. The purpose of this addition was to:

- Provide equal opportunity access to part-time job postings
- Make it easier for students to identify and apply for part-time job opportunities
- Provide increased financial opportunities for UM students
- Improve opportunities for students to connect with the campus community
- Improve students' time management skills
- Help students define their academic and career goals
- Improve the competitiveness of UM students in the job market after graduation
- Have a positive impact on student retention

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

Career Services staff conducted a survey during the spring semester of 2008 in order to assess the effectiveness of the student employment program relative to the above stated program goals. The subject pool was comprised of UM students currently working part-time and being paid through the office of student payroll.

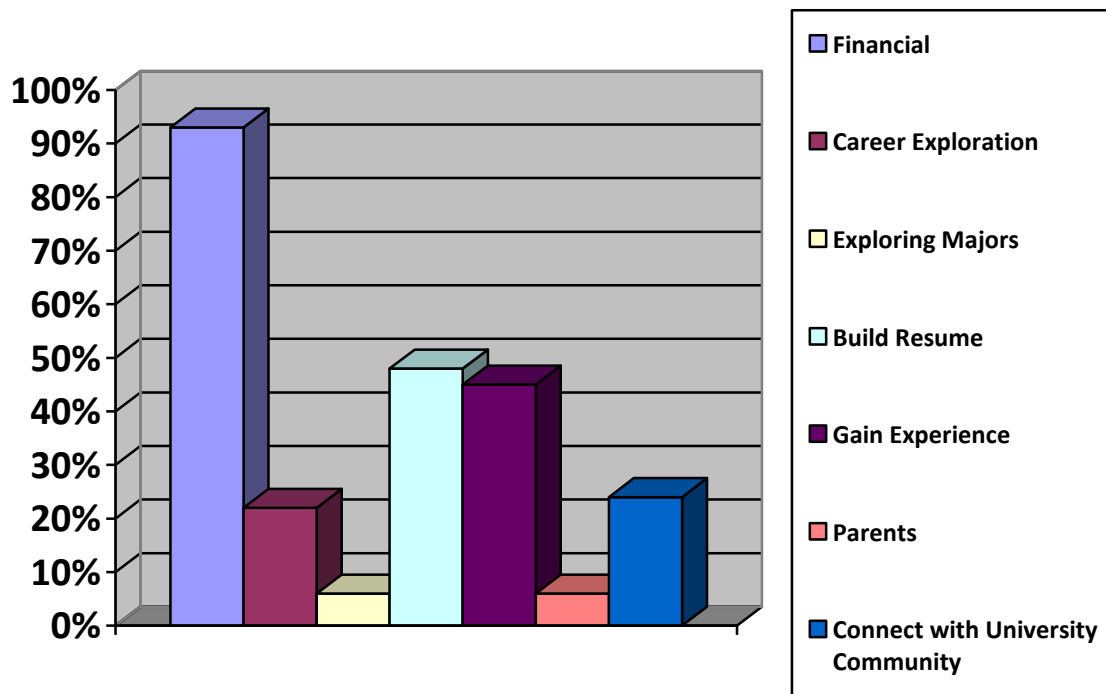
For the purposes of this survey, UM Human Resource Services (HRS), provided electronic mail addresses of all UM students on student payroll. Career Services staff designed and electronically administered the survey using the Information Technology Office's (ITO) web-based survey instrument, *Select Survey*.

The survey was sent out to the student employees (n=2,364) on April 1, 2008 and remained "live" for 3 weeks during which time students could access and respond to the survey. A total of 975 students (41%) responded to the survey.

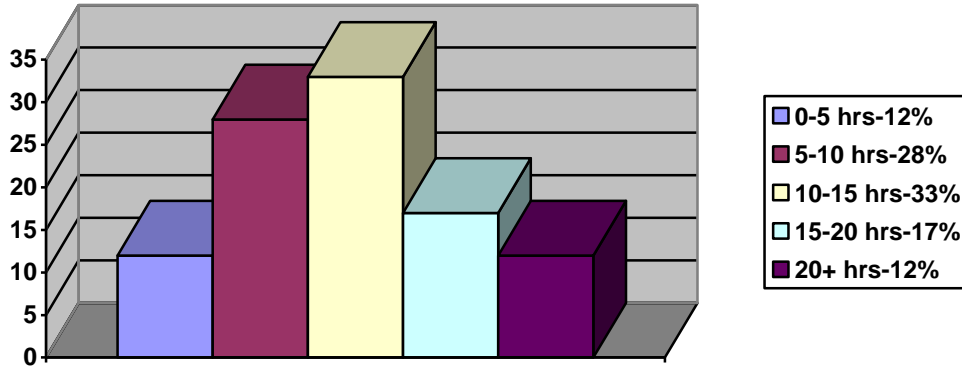
FINDINGS

Question 1 was used to identify the respondents.

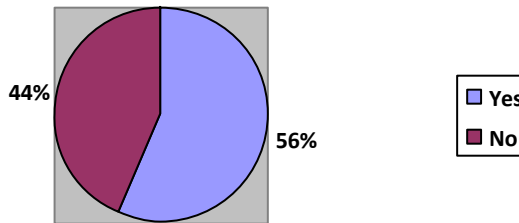
Question 2 asked students to list the reasons they were seeking a student job: 93% reported financial reasons, 22% reported career exploration, 6% reported major exploration, 48% reported to build their resume, 45% reported to gain work experience and build skills related to major and/or career goals, 6% reported parental influence, and 24% reported wanting to make closer connections with the University community.



Question 3 asked students to report the average number of hours worked per week: 12% answered 0-5, 28% answered 5-10, 33% answered 10-15, 17% answered 15-20, and 12% answered 20+.

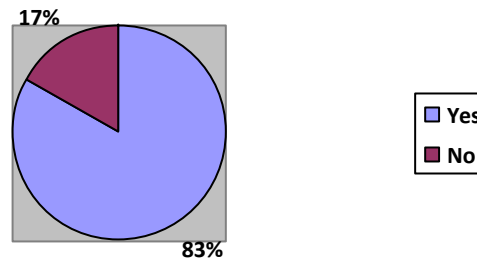


Question 4 asked if student employment financially helped students stay in school: 56% answered yes, and 44% answered no.



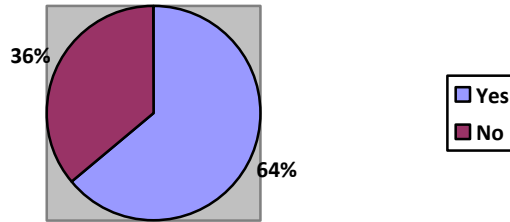
4: Does student employment help you financially to stay in school?

Question 5 asked if balancing academic studies with job experience enhanced students' time management skills: 83% of respondents answered yes, and 17% answered no.



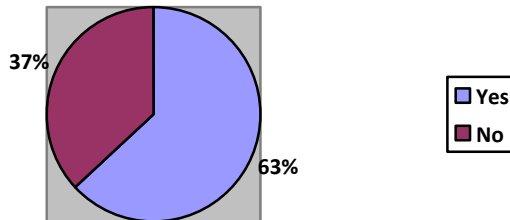
5: Does balancing employment and academics enhance your time management skills?

Question 6 asked if students were able to match their interests and/or areas of study with their part-time jobs: 64% of respondents answered yes, and 36% answered no.



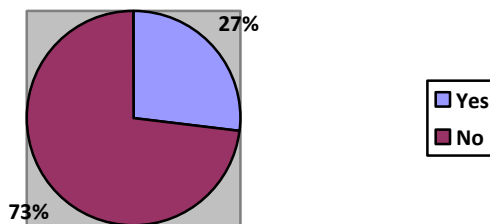
6: Were you able to match your interests and/or areas of study with your part-time job?

Question 7 asked students if they felt that student employment had helped them to define career goals: 63% of respondents answered yes, and 37% answered no.



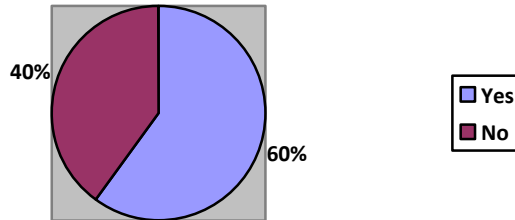
7: Did student employment help you to define career goals?

Question 8 asked if student employment had helped them to choose a major: 27% of respondents answered yes, and 73% answered no.



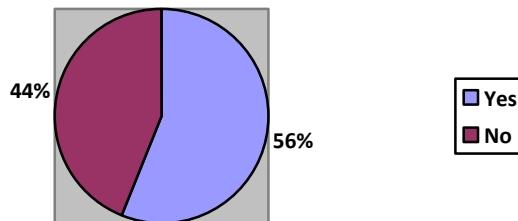
8: Did student employment help you to choose a major?

Question 9 asked if students felt that their employment would allow them to be more competitive in the job market after graduation: 60% of respondents answered yes, and 40% answered no.



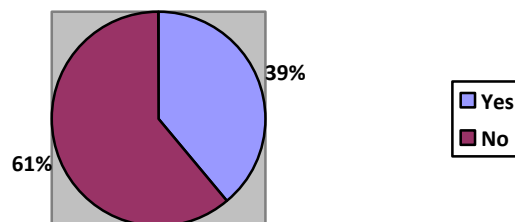
9: Do you feel that your employment will allow you to be more competitive in the job market after graduation?

Question 10 asked if it would be helpful for the Student Employment website to have a link to online resources for writing resumes, cover letters and interviewing: 56% of respondents answered yes, and 44% answered no.



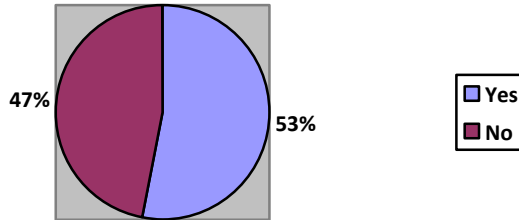
10: Would it be helpful to have online resources for writing resumes, cover letters, and interviewing?

Question 11 asked whether students' supervisors/employers provided any formal evaluation on job performance: 39% answered yes, 61% answered no.



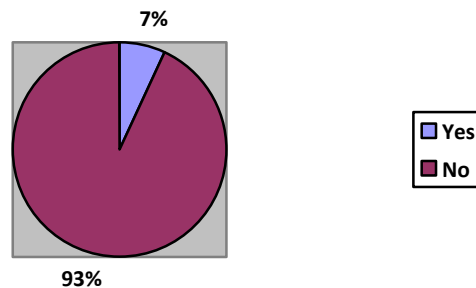
11: Do your supervisors/employers provide any formal evaluation on job performance?

Question 12 asked students who were not provided with formal assessments if formal evaluation would have been helpful: 53% answered yes, and 47% answered no.



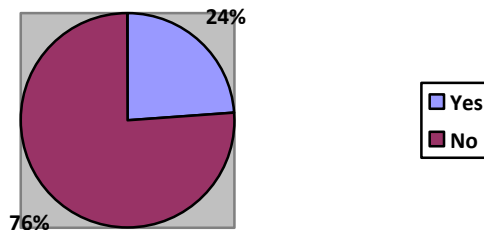
12: If it was not provided, would formal evaluation have been helpful?

Question 13 asked students if they had subscribed to the Temp Job feature on the Student Employment website: 7% answered yes, and 93% answered no.



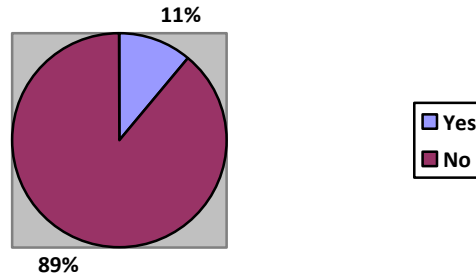
13: Did you subscribe to the Temp Job feature on the website?

Question 14 asked respondents who had subscribed to the Temp Job feature if they found it helpful: 24% said yes and 76% said no.



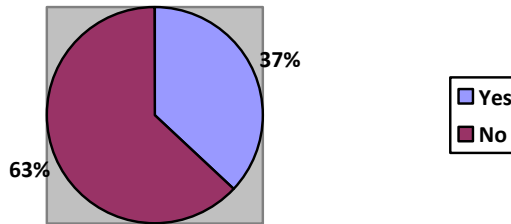
14: If you subscribed, did you find the Temp Job feature helpful?

Question 15 asked if students had subscribed to the electronic notification system (Griz-Tracker feature): 11% answered yes, and 89% said no.



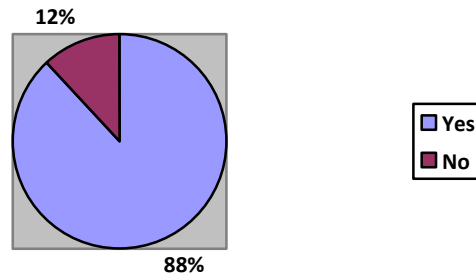
15: Did you subscribe to the electronic notification (Griz-Tracker) feature?

Question 16 asked students who had subscribed to Griz-Tracker if this feature was helpful in identifying jobs: 37% reported that this feature was helpful and 63% said it was not.



16: If you subscribed, did you find the Griz-Tracker helpful in identifying jobs?

Question 17 asked students if they found the Student Employment website easy to navigate and user-friendly: 88% answered yes, and 12% said no.



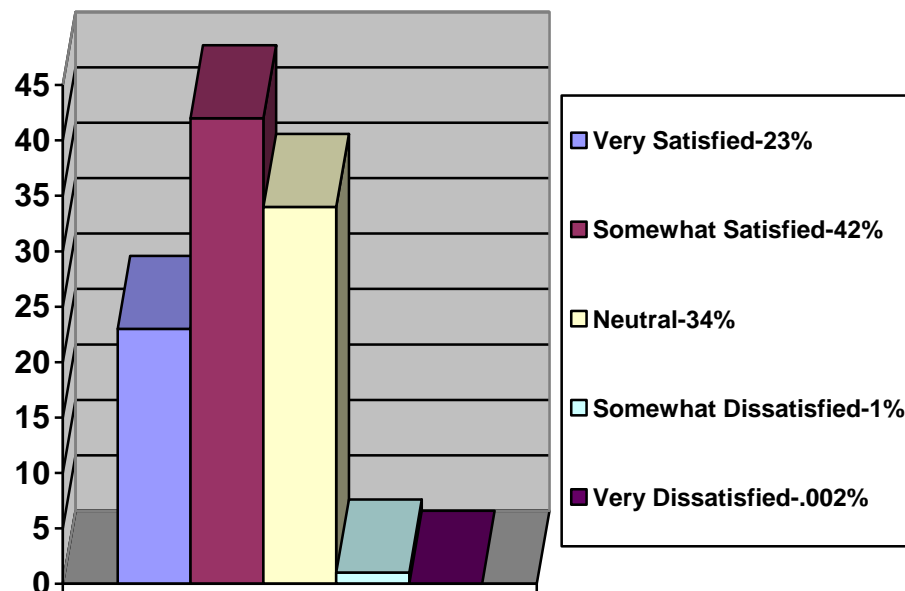
17: Did you find the Student Employment website user-friendly?

Question 18 asked students to provide additional information about whether the Student Employment website was easy to navigate and user-friendly*. The following is a sample of the student responses.

1. I thought it was a little tough finding the link to the employment website, but once there, it was user-friendly.
2. I didn't even know about the Student Employment website. I'll go and check it out now.
3. It was confusing and not user-friendly. The meta-application process was cumbersome, and most employers wanted you to fill out an extra application.
4. The jobs I put in my cart could not be saved for another session. Therefore, I had to go back when I had a considerable amount of time to do it all in one session. Also, the jobs were not listed in the same order every time, so this made the process even more time-consuming. However, I liked the ease of only having to fill out one initial application, although some prospective employers wanted an additional one as well.

* 65% of respondents (74/114) who commented about whether the website was user-friendly also reported never having used the website.

Survey question 19 asked students to rate their level of overall satisfaction with the website and 23% were very satisfied, 42% were somewhat satisfied, 34% were neutral, 1% were somewhat dissatisfied and .002% were very dissatisfied.



Question 20 asked respondents for comments or suggestions about how the Student Employment website and/or process could be improved. The following is a sample of these comments.

1. If there were links to jobs within or pertaining to certain departments or majors, I would have found that helpful.
2. The website was great—extremely helpful and easy to use. In that respect, you're doing a great job. Regarding employment itself, I have two main critiques. First is the lack of performance appraisals, which your survey addressed. It is my understanding that most, if not all, "real world" jobs use a performance appraisal process. Using this in student employment, even if the job description might seem pretty straightforward, would help improve student performance on the job and help the student get a better feel for what the real world is like. After all, isn't that what college is – preparing us for our real world careers?
3. I believe that the university needs to take some major steps in the treatment and paying of their student employees. The flexibilities of on-campus scheduling allows for many more opportunities, but the lack of strong management and performance evaluation leaves me and many others seeking off-campus jobs to get by...All in all, I enjoy my work on campus but feel we need to move into the 20th century with more professionalism, better pay and perhaps more understanding managerial staff.
4. I struggled finding jobs that weren't work study. Since I am not eligible for work study I felt most of the jobs were directed to those students.
5. It would make it easier to apply for jobs at different times if you could save the written sections of the applications on the server if possible.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Surveying students and obtaining personal responses provided Career Services staff with a greater appreciation for and understanding of many aspects of student employment. Recommendations for future analyses and change follow a discussion of the data.

Students reported liking that on-campus employers were flexible and worked to ensure that class and work schedules were compatible, and the convenience of having classes and their place of employment in close proximity. The majority of students, however, also reported that wages were typically better for off-campus jobs. Many respondents commented that they preferred to, and began working on campus, but were forced to seek off-campus employment for financial reasons. Most students report being negatively affected by the combination of low wages and high costs for tuition and living expenses.

Students were frustrated by employers not removing outdated job postings, not removing listings after the position had been filled, not responding to online applications, requiring a separate application form, and not having in-depth or accurate job descriptions.

Students liked many of the website's features including the search engine allowing separate job searches for work study, non-work study, on-and off-campus employment;

the ability to apply for several jobs with one application; and email alerts. The majority of students, however, reported not using the Temp Job or Griz Tracker features. Most respondents found the website user-friendly. Further assessment of its functionality should include a comparison between Career Services' website and the Griz eRecruiting websites.

A number of students commented on a lack of non-work study positions on campus. Students also commented about the limitations on the number of hours work study students can work per week.

Some students thought having links to resume, cover letter, and interviewing information would be helpful, and Career Services will follow through on that recommendation and add those links to the website.

Students reported a lack of performance evaluation and inappropriate and/or ineffective supervision and management in their work environments. Career Services plans to collaborate with other Student Affairs departments and try to professionalize Student Employment and create more opportunities for career-oriented skill development for student employees.

In response to repeated comments concerning professionalism and career relevance of student employment opportunities on-campus, Career Services recommends contacting and sharing findings with other relevant departments including HRS, Enrollment Services, Internship Services, and possibly Dining Services (for an employer perspective) to discuss the possibility of creating a task force or committee designed to professionalize and increase potential for career-oriented skill development in student employment. This could include components for supervisor training and student employee training and orientation.