

BRIEF: Educational Experiences of Working and Non-Working Seniors

An earlier brief¹ reported that nearly half of graduating seniors report working at least 16 hours per week in their last year at UB, with around 20.0% working more than 30 hours. This brief examines the educational experiences of working seniors based on responses to the 2007 *Senior Exit Survey*.

Survey Response and Representation

Of the 2,617 students who, as of July 5, 2007, either received degrees or remained candidates for Spring degree conferral, 914 completed the survey (34.9%)². Respondents, as compared to the full pool of graduates, are more likely to be female (57.2% vs. 48.4%) and have higher grades (3.23 vs. 3.12) but are less likely to be under-represented minorities (8.9% vs. 9.7%). Thus, data were weighted according to these three variables to better approximate the responses of all graduates. For this brief, students are categorized as not working (21.4%), working part-time (up to 20 hours per week; 31.4%), and working full-time (more than 20 hours per week; 47.2%). On average, students in the part-time group worked 10 hours per week ($SD = 4.5$), and those in the full-time group worked 30 hours per week ($SD = 8.7$).

Table 1: Demographic and Educational Characteristics of Working and Non-Working Seniors

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Not Working (N=195)</i>	<i>Part-Time (N=286)</i>	<i>Full-Time (N=430)</i>
Gender (% Female)	37.4 ^a	46.9 ^b	54.4 ^c
Under-Represented Minority (%)	15.3 ^a	13.3 ^a	11.4 ^a
Educational Opportunity Program (%)	3.6 ^{a,b}	4.9 ^a	2.6 ^b
Geographic Origin (% from WNY)	28.1 ^a	37.4 ^b	58.6 ^c
International (%)	18.5 ^a	15.0 ^b	5.6 ^c
Athlete Status (%)	2.1 ^a	2.4 ^a	0.7 ^b
Honors Scholar (%)	19.0 ^a	27.6 ^b	27.2 ^b
Entered UB as Freshman (%)	64.1 ^a	73.9 ^b	54.3 ^c
Age at Degree Conferral (mean)	23 ^a	22 ^b	23 ^{a,b}
Cumulative UB QPA (mean)	3.13 ^a	3.22 ^a	3.16 ^a
School/College of Primary Major			
Architecture and Planning (%)	3.1 ^a	2.8 ^a	2.1 ^a
Arts and Sciences (%)	53.3 ^a	50.0 ^a	61.0 ^b
Engineering and Applied Sciences (%)	15.9 ^{a,b}	19.6 ^a	13.9 ^b
Management (%)	14.4 ^a	16.4 ^a	14.6 ^a
Medicine and Biomedical Sciences (%)	6.7 ^a	5.2 ^a	3.5 ^b
Nursing (%)	1.5 ^a	2.1 ^a	2.3 ^a
Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences (%)	1.0 ^a	0.0 ^a	0.0 ^a
Public Health (%)	3.1 ^a	2.8 ^a	2.1 ^a
Combined Degree Programs/Other (%)	1.0 ^a	1.0 ^a	0.4 ^b
Graduated in 4 years (% , Entered as Freshmen)	76.0 ^a	79.7 ^a	75.9 ^a
Graduated in 4 years (% , Entered as Transfers)	91.5 ^a	93.3 ^a	89.7 ^a

Note: Use of the same superscript across groups indicates statistical equivalence. When the superscript of a percentage or average differs from those in the same row, a statistical difference is indicated.

Demographic and Educational Characteristics of Working and Non-Working Seniors

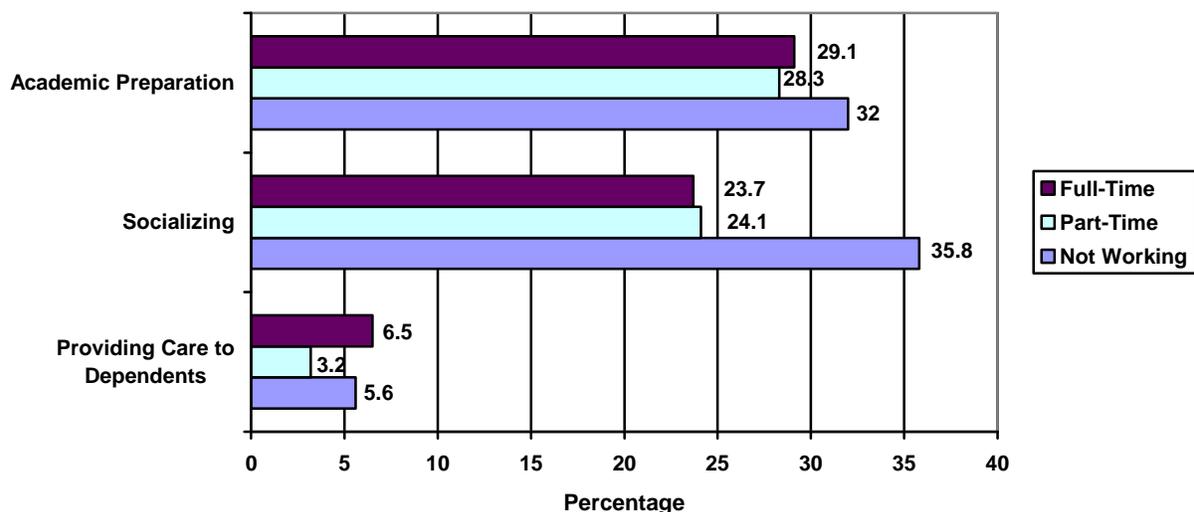
Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for each group. There were interesting demographic differences among the groups in terms of gender, geographic place of origin, citizenship, and entering status at UB (freshman versus transfer). The proportion of females in each group increases monotonically from those not working to those working full-time. The same is true for the proportion from the Western New York area. The proportion of international students decreases monotonically from those not working to those working full-time as does the proportion who entered UB as freshmen. In addition, students in the full-time group are significantly more likely to have majors in Arts and Sciences and significantly less likely to have majors in Engineering and Medicine/Biomedical Sciences.

As one might expect, students who worked full-time in their last year of enrollment were significantly more likely to report that they required more than eight semesters to graduate than students in the non-working and part-time groups (48.0% compared to 33.9% and 35.8%, respectively). Students in the full-time employment group were also more likely than students in the other two groups to indicate that working was a primary reason for needing more than eight semesters (37.0% compared to 17.0% and 19.0%, respectively). However, regardless of whether students entered UB as freshmen or transfers, working group was unrelated to their ability to graduate within 4 years³. In addition, students in all three groups graduated with similar grades (QPA's).

Time Allocation During the Last Year of Enrollment

Activities which occupied students more than 16 hours per week during their last year at UB are shown in Figure 1. Members of all three groups were equally likely to report spending more than 16 hours per week on academic preparation. However, those students not working during their last year were much more likely to report socializing for 16 or more hours per week than those who worked full- or part-time. In fact, slightly more of the non-working students reported spending 16 or more hours per week socializing than reported spending 16 or more hours on academic preparation. Both those who did not work and those who worked full-time were more likely to report caring for dependents more than 16 hours per week than were those who worked part-time.

Figure 1. Percentage of Students Spending 16 or More Hours Per Week in Various Activities



Student Engagement at UB

In addition to the impact that working has on the amount of time students can devote to other activities, it may also impact the degree to which they are committed to or engaged in these other activities. Comparisons of participation were made among the three groups on a variety of activities thought to signify college student engagement. On average, students who worked part-time during their last year of enrollment participated in significantly more engaging activities than did the other two groups (16.0; $SD = 2.6$). Those who worked full-time participated in significantly more of these activities (15.5; $SD = 2.4$) than did the students who did not work at all (14.6; $SD = 2.5$). Table 2 shows participation rates for selected activities thought to be indicators of student engagement.

In terms of engagement specifically related to coursework, students who work full-time are more likely to ask questions in class and contribute to class discussion and are less likely to report feeling bored in class, to be late for class, and to skip class as compared to students who work part-time. However, students employed full-time were also more likely than both of the other groups to miss class due to employment. Surprisingly, the students most engaged in non-academic activities were those who worked part-time in the last year. Further, those who work full-time were more likely than those not working to report participation in extracurricular activities and student organizations, as well as community service.

Table 2: Percentage of Students Participating in Engaging Activities

<i>Engaging Activity</i>	<i>Not Working (N=195)</i>	<i>Part-Time (N=286)</i>	<i>Full-Time (N=430)</i>
<i>Academic Activities</i>			
Asked questions in class	90.3 ^a	94.3 ^b	96.5 ^c
Bored in class	95.4 ^a	91.2 ^b	88.1 ^c
Came late to class	70.1 ^a	80.4 ^b	68.1 ^a
Contributed to class discussion	92.8 ^a	94.7 ^a	97.0 ^b
Discussed ideas from readings or classes outside of class	92.8 ^a	95.4 ^b	93.4
Failed to complete homework on time	47.7 ^a	58.6 ^b	57.2 ^b
Missed class due to employment	7.7 ^a	39.0 ^b	56.0 ^c
Served as a subject in research project	54.9 ^a	69.9 ^b	71.7 ^b
Skipped class	85.7 ^a	87.4 ^b	84.2 ^a
Thought critically	99.0 ^a	98.9 ^a	97.7 ^b
Tutored another student	51.3 ^a	67.6 ^b	64.8 ^b
Worked on research project with faculty member outside of class	14.7 ^a	25.7 ^b	18.5 ^c
<i>Non-Academic Activities</i>			
Attended Campus Activities and Events	89.7 ^a	94.4 ^b	85.2 ^c
Participated in Extracurricular Activities/Student Organizations	75.3 ^a	88.5 ^b	80.4 ^c
Performed Community Service or Volunteered	66.5 ^a	84.9 ^b	78.8 ^c

Note: Use of the same superscript across groups indicates statistical equivalence. When the superscript of a percentage differs from those in the same row, a statistical difference is indicated.

Loan Debt and Future Employment

Over half of the students in each group left UB with educational debt, but the percentages increase from non-working students to part-time students and from part-time students to full-time students. Among the students who have debt, the part-time students have the lowest amount, but they are equally likely to report that they will be seeking employment after graduation as compared to those not working. In contrast to what might be expected, students in the full-time group were less likely than the other two groups to report plans to seek employment after graduation. Further analysis of the full-time group reveals that the males in the group are as likely as the other two groups to seek employment after graduation (56.4%), but the females in the group are significantly less likely to report doing so (42.7%). However, females in the full-time group are no more likely than those in the other two groups to plan to continue their education, making their reasons for not planning to work after graduation unclear. Among the students who plan to work, students in the part-time group expect to make the most money, in the \$40,000-49,999 range.

Table 3: Existing Loan Debt and Employment Plans

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Not Working (N=195)</i>	<i>Part-Time (N=286)</i>	<i>Full-Time (N=430)</i>
Educational Loan Debt			
Leaving UB with Educational Debt	61.0 ^a	69.7 ^b	79.1 ^c
Median Amount of Debt	\$15,000-19,999	\$10,000-14,999	\$15,000-19,999
Post Graduation Plans			
Have Secured or Seeking Employment	60.0 ^a	55.6 ^a	49.1 ^b
Continuing Education	33.2 ^a	32.2 ^a	30.5 ^a
Median Expected Starting Salary	\$30,000-39,999	\$40,000-49,999	\$30,000-39,999

Note: Use of the same superscript across groups indicates statistical equivalence. When the superscript of a percentage differs from those in the same row, a statistical difference is indicated.

Conclusions

Employment in college is often seen as a negative, detracting from learning and preventing involvement in non-academic activities, as well as prolonging the time to graduation. Among students who graduate, however, employed students, regardless of the number of hours they work, are no less likely than unemployed students to graduate within 4 years, and they earn equivalent grades. Those who work full-time are more likely to miss class due to employment and may have difficulties getting assignments turned in, but they are more engaged in class activities. Those who work part-time are the most engaged in non-academic activities. These results suggest that working during college may actually increase motivation and engagement among successful students, those who complete the requirements of the undergraduate degree. What the results from these analyses cannot address, however, is the role that working may play in preventing graduation for those students who leave UB before successful completion of the undergraduate degree.

- ¹ The brief, entitled *Profiles of Graduating Seniors: Differences Between Those Who Entered as Freshmen and Those Who Entered as Transfers*, is available at:
[http://apb.buffalo.edu/reports/briefs/studentexperiences/ProfilesofGraduatingSeniors\(2007\).pdf](http://apb.buffalo.edu/reports/briefs/studentexperiences/ProfilesofGraduatingSeniors(2007).pdf)
- ² Not all students answered every item; thus individual items may have missing data. Frequencies and percentages for individual items are based only on the students who answered the item.
- ³ These percentages should not be interpreted as the percentage of students *within a cohort* who graduate within a specific time frame. For example, on average, 31.9% of freshmen entering within a give year graduate within 4 years; the denominator in this case is the number of entering freshmen. In this brief, we are looking only at those who graduated in Spring 2007, and the denominator is the number of *graduates*. Of those who entered as freshmen *and* graduated in Spring 2007, 76.0% did so within 4 years.