

**The Hourly Rate Of Learning:
Skills Students Learn While Working In College**

By

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(ABSTRACT)

One purpose of higher education is to graduate students who will become productive citizens. An integral aspect of being a productive citizen is employment. Finding a job requires the acquisition of skills that employers report they seek in college graduates. There are various ways that students can learn these skills. They can be learned in the classroom, and through extracurricular activities. They can also be learned from students' part time employment.

Part-time employment is a significant part of the college experience for many undergraduate students. Students are employed in a variety of different jobs while in college. These jobs can be grouped into three categories: cooperative education experiences, leadership positions, and wage positions. Scholars have explored the impact of cooperative and leadership positions on students. However, an extensive search of the literature revealed no studies which investigated the kinds of skills students in wage positions learn. Yet, the number of students employed in wage positions may exceed the number of students employed in the other two types of student jobs.

The purpose of this study was to examine the skills learned by undergraduate students who were employed in on-campus wage positions. The study was designed to measure whether the skills student employees learn are skills that employers seek in college graduates.

To seek answers to these research questions a list of skills was developed from the literature available on job skills employers seek in college graduates. After determining the eight most common skills employers seek in college graduates they hire, the researcher operationalized the skills by assigning typical job-related activities to each of the eight skills identified in the literature as being sought by employers of college graduates. Then, the researcher recruited 32 undergraduate students (16 male and 16 female) in wage positions to report data about what they learned while working. These data were collected through logs that detailed activities in which student employees engaged while on the job.

The study found that students in on-campus wage positions engaged in certain activities more than others. The activities in which they engaged indicated that they were learning some skills which employers seek in college graduates. Results showed that participants reported a high number of activities which related to Analytical Skills, Adaptability/Flexibility, and Communication Skills. Participants reported activities which related to Interpersonal Skills and Teamwork Skills to a moderate degree. Activities related to Initiative, Self Confidence, and Leadership Skills were reported least often. Differences were found in the reporting patterns of men and women. Some of these differences were found to be significant.