

The Employment Survey of Residential Sophomores, 2009

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I. Introduction

One of the strategic actions proposed in the University's 2014 Strategic Plan is to "improve student engagement in on-campus life through co-curricular programming that includes drawing residential and academic life close together." To achieve this goal, the University will "increase the number of jobs on campus, and the desirability of those jobs compared to off campus work, for undergraduate students."

The Profile of the American College Student Survey (conducted in 2008) found that more Mason sophomores reported working for pay than students from any other class level and the percentage of working students jumped from 37% among freshmen to 69% among sophomores. To better understand employment related issues of sophomores, the University Career Services, the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS), the Office of Housing and Residence Life, and the Office of Institutional Assessment (OIA) collaboratively conducted the Employment Survey of Residential Sophomores (referred to as the Employment Survey in this report). The survey topics include employment status, the impact of work on academics and engagement in campus activities, and perceived employment opportunities on campus.

About 1200 copies of the Employment Survey were distributed in March 2009 by Residential Advisors (RAs) at selected on-campus housing sites that were occupied primarily by sophomore students. A total of 428 completed surveys were collected by RAs, for a response rate of 36%. Among the respondents, 368 students — 86% of the total respondents — identified themselves as sophomores. **This report only summarizes the survey results of residential sophomores (n=368).** It compares subgroups of sophomores by the following three criteria:

- Employment status (working vs non-working)
- The location of employment (on-campus vs off-campus)
- Work hours (10 hours or less, 11-20 hours, and 21 hours or more)

NOTE

- In this report, the terms "sophomores" and "residential students" refer to residential sophomores who participated in the Employment Survey of Residential Students.
- Readers should keep in mind that the survey was not randomly distributed.

¹ We would like to thank Sandy Scherrens, Patricia Carretta, and Rose Pascarell at University Life for inspiring our research and providing valuable comments on an earlier draft of this report. Special thanks to Pat Williams at Career Services and Aida Sanchez at Housing and Residence Life for their support in the data collection and data entry process.

II. Highlights

Current Employment

- 54% of the residential sophomores who completed the survey are currently employed. Among those working sophomores, about half work only off-campus and 39% work only on-campus. The remaining 10% hold jobs both off-campus and on-campus.
- On average, sophomores working off-campus have longer working hours and are paid higher hourly wages than their peers working on-campus: 41% of sophomores working off-campus spend 16 or more hours at work/week, compared with 19% of those working on-campus. The median hourly wage reported by these students for off-campus jobs is \$10 and \$8 for on-campus jobs.

Employment and Academic Performance

- The vast majority of working sophomores work largely to meet financial needs, not to gain professional experiences relevant to their majors. A little more than 50% of working sophomores say that providing financial support to family is the primary reason for their employment, followed by helping pay tuition and fees (20%). About two thirds of working sophomores say that their jobs are not related to their majors; only 2% of working sophomores work primarily to gain work experience before graduation.
- Sophomores working more than 20 hours per week are less likely to say that their job has a positive impact on their academic performance than their peers working fewer hours. Nonetheless, 87% of all working students say that they can balance work and study.

What Matters Most When Considering a Job?

- When considering a position for pay, class scheduling and relevance to major or career goals are considered more critical to non-working sophomores than students who are working.

On-Campus Job Opportunities

- Half of sophomores working on-campus found their on-campus jobs through online resources such as e-mail/listserv (37%) and Patriot Job Web (12%).
- The respondents would like to have on-campus jobs related to their majors and/or their future careers. Administrative jobs, food services, and library positions are also frequently mentioned as desirable jobs on-campus.

NOTE

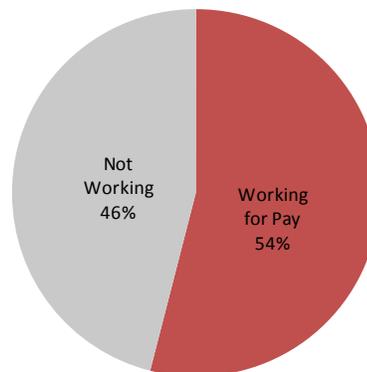
- Percentages in this report may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
- Frequency and mean calculations in this report exclude “don’t know” and “not applicable” responses.

III. Current Employment

1. Employment Status of Residential Sophomores

A little over 50% of residential sophomores who completed the survey are currently employed (see Figure 1). Among *working* sophomores, 8% say that they hold work-study positions through the Federal Financial Aid Program (data not presented here).

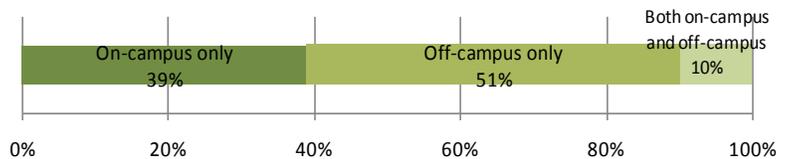
Figure 1. Employment Status of Residential Sophomores Who Completed the Survey (n=367)



2. Location of Employment

Among working sophomores, about half work only off-campus and 39% work only on-campus (see Figure 2). The remaining work both on-campus and off-campus.

Figure 2. The Location of Employment (n=185)



3. Work Hours

On average, sophomores working on-campus spend 11.3 hours per week at work, while those working off-campus spend 15.6 hours at work. Table 1 compares work hours between those who have on-campus jobs and those who have off-campus jobs. The respondents working off-campus spend longer hours at work than their peers working on-campus: 41% of sophomores with off-campus jobs work 16 or more hours/week, compared with 19% of their peers working on-campus.

Table 1. Work Hours by Job Location

	On-campus Job (n=87 ¹)	Off-campus Job (n=114 ¹)
5 hours or less	22%	7%
6-10 hours	38%	27%
11-15 hours	21%	25%
16-20 hours	12%	22%
More than 20 hours	7%	19%
Total	100%	100%

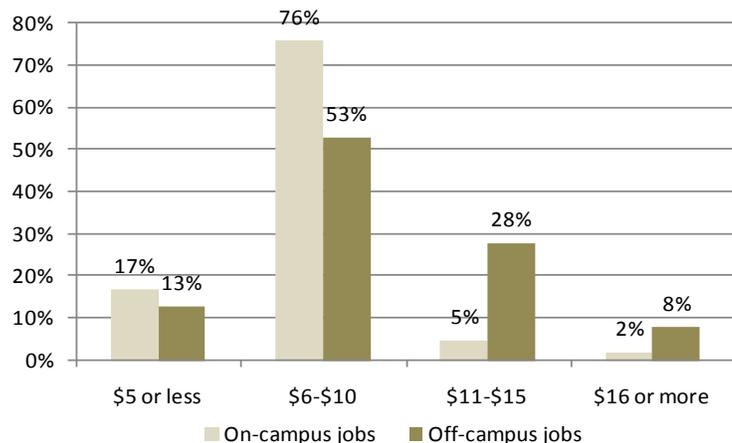
¹The total number of students who answered questions about work hours is 201, which exceeds the total number of respondents, 185, because 16 students who work both on-campus and off-campus reported work hours for on-campus and off-campus jobs separately and their responses were counted for each category.

4. Average Pay per Hour

The survey asked respondents to report, on average, how much they are paid per hour for on-campus and off-campus jobs respectively. On average, off-campus jobs pay more than on-campus jobs: the median hourly wage of off-campus jobs is \$10, while that of on-campus jobs is \$8. The hourly wages of off-campus jobs range from \$2.13 to \$32 and those of on-campus jobs range from \$3.75 to \$17.

Figure 3 presents the distribution of pay by job location. The majority of on-campus jobs (76%) pay between \$6 and \$10 per hour compared with a little over half of off-campus jobs. A little over one third of off-campus jobs (36%) pay \$11 or more per hour compared with 7% of on-campus jobs.

Figure 3. Pay per Hour by Job Location



Note: The survey asked for hourly wages for on-campus and off-campus jobs separately. Students working both on-campus and off-campus provided separate rates.

IV. Employment and Academic Performance

1. Primary Reason for Employment by Job Location

Students report that their primary reason for working is to provide financial support to family (52%), followed by to help pay tuition and fees (20%) (see Table 2). Further analyses revealed that sophomores working *both* on- and off-campus responded to this question differently than their peers working at one location only. Sophomores working both on- and off-campus also cite providing financial support to their families as a primary reason to work, but to a lesser extent (24%); they are more likely to say they work to help pay tuition and fees (29%) and to buy academic supplies and textbooks than other students. Because students working on- and off-campus represent a small proportion of the survey sample, these data should be interpreted with caution.

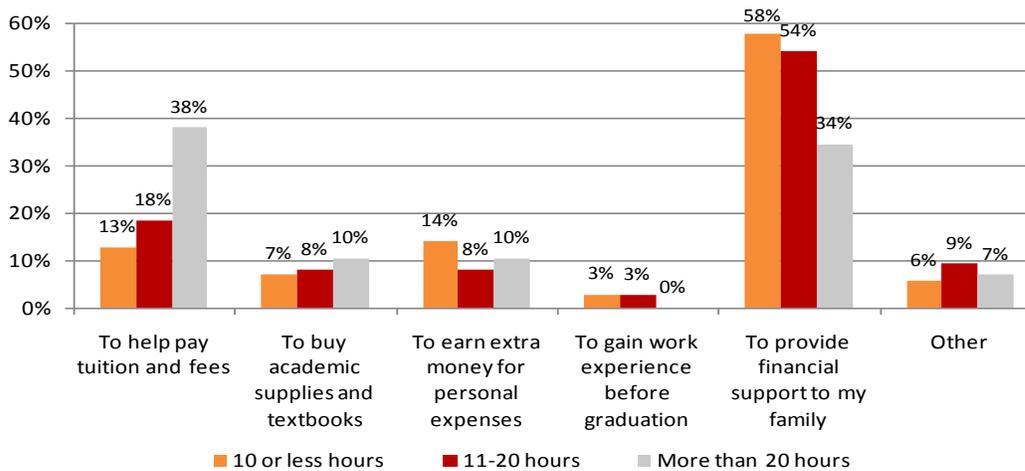
Table 2. Primary Reason for Employment by Job Location (Choose One)

	Work on-campus only	Work off-campus only	Work on-campus & off-campus	Total
To provide financial support to my family	57%	54%	24%	52%
To help pay tuition and fees	15%	22%	29%	20%
To earn extra money for personal expenses	12%	10%	12%	11%
Other reasons	9%	6%	12%	7%
To buy academic supplies and textbooks	4%	7%	18%	7%
To gain work experience before graduation	3%	1%	6%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

2. Primary Reason for Employment by Work Hours

For students working 20 hours or less per week, the primary reason for doing so is to provide financial support to their families: 58% of those working *10 hours or less* and 54% of those working *11-20 hours* cite this as a primary reason. Sophomores who work *more than 20 hours* per week share this reason, but to a lesser extent (34%); they also cite helping to pay tuition and fees as a primary reason (38%). Regardless of work hours, very few working sophomores work primarily to gain work experience before graduation.

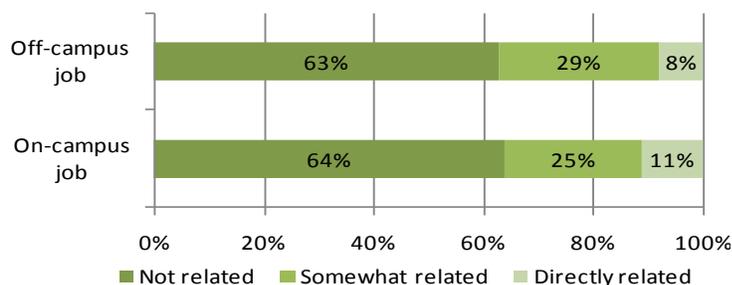
Figure 4. Primary Reason for Employment by Work Hours



3. How Relevant is Your Job to Your Major(s)?

The survey asked respondents how relevant their jobs are to their majors. The location of employment (on-campus/off-campus) makes no difference in how relevant student jobs are to their majors. Regardless of job location, about one third of working sophomores say that their jobs are “somewhat related” or “directly related” to their majors; almost two thirds say their jobs are not related to their majors.

Figure 5. “How Relevant is Your Job to Your Major(s)?”

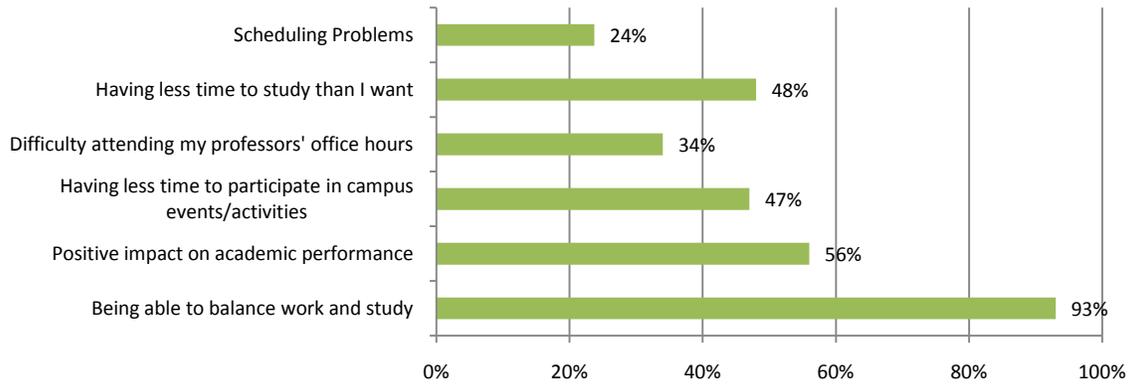


Note: This question was asked for on-campus job and for off-campus job separately. Students working both on-campus and off-campus answered both of these questions.

4. Impact of Employment on Academic Performance

How does employment impact students' academic performance? The survey asked respondents about their experience with six positive or negative impacts of employment on their academic performance (see Figure 6). The overwhelming majority (93%) of working sophomores say that they can balance work and study. Almost half of them say that they have less time than they would like to study or to participate in campus events/activities because of work. At the same time, 56% report that work has positive impacts on their academic performance.

Figure 6. The Impact of Employment on Academic Performance: The Percentage of Students Who Chose "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" for the Following Statements¹



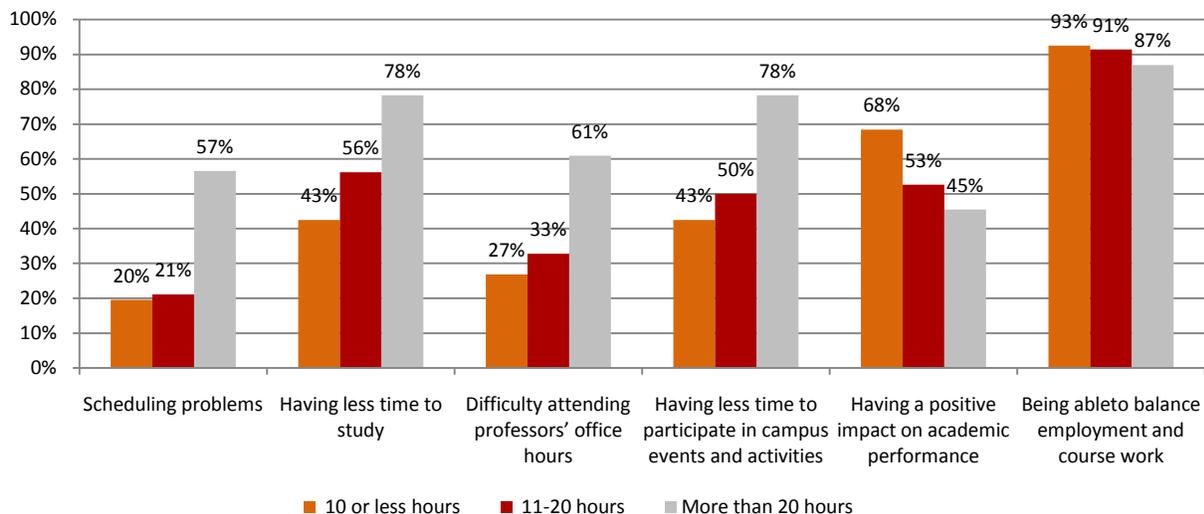
¹The respondents were asked to choose from the following 4 options for each statement: "Strongly agree," "Agree", "Disagree", and "Strongly disagree." The percentages presented in the graphs are those who chose "Strongly agree" or "Agree".

5. Impact of Employment on Academic Performance by Work Hours

Figure 7 compares the levels of impact of employment on academic performance by work hours. Students report that longer work hours have a significant and negative impact on their academic performance.

Most notably, sophomores working more than 20 hours a week experience significant and negative repercussions on their academic performance (schedule conflict, having less time to study, difficulty attending professors' office hours, and having less time to participate in campus events) compared with their peers working fewer hours — particularly 10 hours or less. Yet, the majority of all working students (87%) report that they can balance job and course work and about two thirds (68%) of sophomores working 10 hours or less a week say that work has a positive impact on their academic performance — this figure is significantly higher than that of their peers working more hours.

Figure 7. Percentage of Students Who Reported the Impact of Employment on Academic Performance by Work Hours

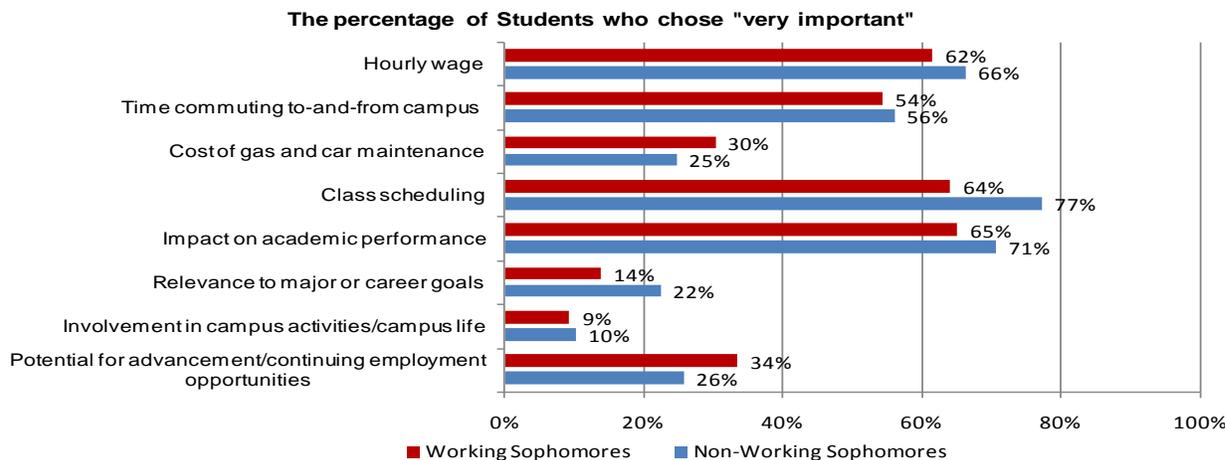


V. What Matters Most When Considering a Job?

1. Important Factors When Considering a Position for Pay

When considering a position for pay, two out of three students think factors such as hourly wage, class scheduling, and impact on academic performance are “very important,” regardless of their current employment status. Class scheduling and relevance to major or career goals are significantly more critical to non-working sophomores than to their working peers. About one third (34%) of working sophomores consider potential for advancement/continuing employment opportunities “very important,” compared with 26% of their non-working peers. Less than 10% of the respondents feel involvement in campus activities/campus life to be “very important.”

Figure 8. Important Factors When Considering a Job



Note: The respondents were asked to choose from the following 4 choices for each statement: “Very important”, “Somewhat important”, “Somewhat unimportant”, and “Not important at all.” The percentages presented in the graphs are those who chose “Very important”.

2. The Most Important Factor When Considering a Position for Pay

Over one third of both working and non-working sophomores chose hourly wage as the most important factor for employment, followed by impact on academic performance (see Table 3). At the same time, class scheduling matters more to non-working sophomores than to working sophomores. For non-working sophomores, class scheduling is ranked third; for working sophomores, it ranked fifth. Potential for advancement/continuing employment opportunities ranked third among working sophomores.

Table 3. The Most Important Factor for Employment (Choose One)

Non-Working Sophomores		Working Sophomores	
1	Hourly wage 35%	1	Hourly wage 39%
2	Impact on academic performance 28%	2	Impact on academic performance 27%
3	Class scheduling 14%	3	Potential for advancement/continuing employment opportunities 9%
4	Relevance to major or career goals 8%	4	Relevance to major or career goals 8%
5	Potential for advancement/continuing employment opportunities 7%	5	Class scheduling 7%
6	Time commuting to-and-from campus 4%	6	Time commuting to-and-from campus 6%
7	Cost of gas and car maintenance 2%	7	Cost of gas and car maintenance 2%
8	Involvement in campus activities/campus life 2%	8	Involvement in campus activities/campus life 2%

VI. On-Campus Job Opportunities

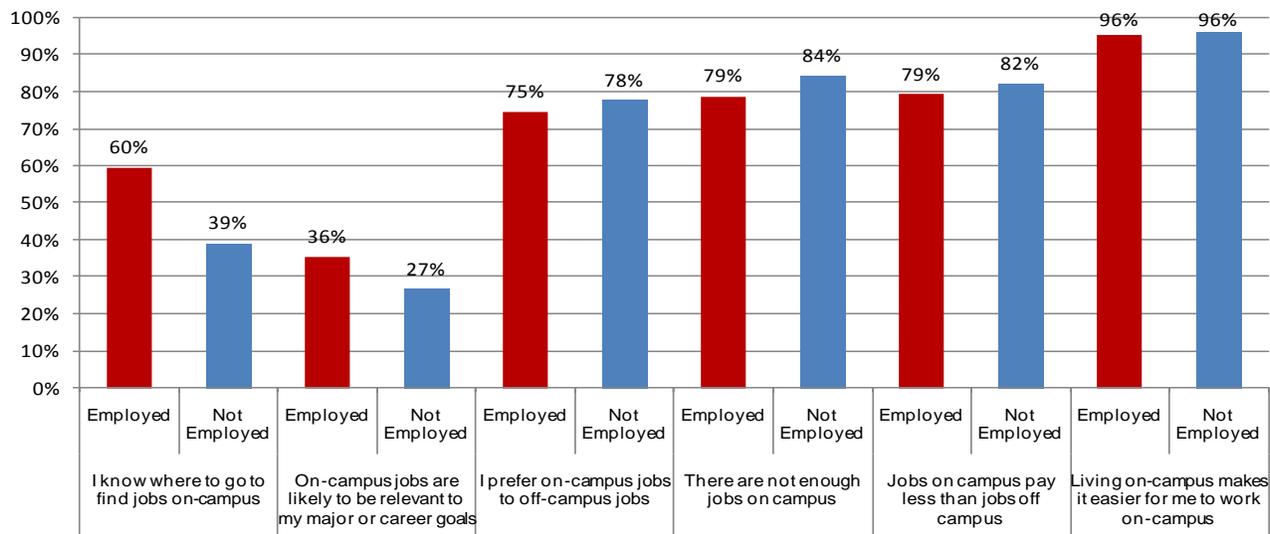
1. Perception about On-Campus Employment

Working sophomores and non-working sophomores have different perceptions about on-campus job opportunities. Figure 9 compares the percentages of sophomores choosing “agree” or “strongly agree” with each of six statements about on-campus job opportunities by employment status. Compared with non-working sophomores, working sophomores are significantly more likely to know where to find on-campus jobs and to consider on-campus jobs more relevant to their majors or career goals. (Mean comparison results are not shown here.)

Survey results indicate that the majority of residential sophomores (75%) prefer on-campus jobs to off-campus jobs regardless of their employment status. The respondents feel that living on-campus makes it easier to work on-campus as well. At the same time, most students (80%) believe that there are not enough on-campus jobs available and that those jobs are not well-paid. These survey results suggest that job availability and relevance to student majors or career goals would offset the perception that on-campus jobs may not offer competitive hourly wages and make on-campus jobs more desirable to residential students.

While 60% of working sophomores chose “agree” or “strongly agree” that they know where to go to find jobs on-campus, only 9% chose “strongly agree” for the statement – almost the same percentage as non-working sophomores (data not shown here). This result indicates that working sophomores may have a general sense of where to find on-campus jobs, but they may not know exactly.

Figure 9. Percentage of Students who “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with the Following Statements about On-Campus Job Opportunities by Employment Status



* The respondents were asked to choose from the following 4 choices for each statement: “Strongly agree”, “Agree”, “Disagree”, and “Strongly disagree.” The percentages presented in the graphs are those who chose “Strongly agree” or “Agree”.

2. How Students Found On-Campus Jobs

The survey asked the respondents working on-campus to identify how they found their on-campus jobs. E-mail/listserv is ranked No.1 as the source of finding on-campus employment. Most students who chose “other” did not identify specific sources but a few students said their RA’s (Resident Advisors) were the source of on-campus employment opportunities. Another online resource, Patriot Job Web, is ranked third. Combining E-mail/listserv and Patriot Job Web, about half of sophomores working on-campus found their jobs using online employment resources. This suggests that electronic methods of listing jobs are very important to students looking for work.

Table 4. How Students Working On-Campus Found Their Jobs (Choose One)

Source	%
1 E-mail/Listserv	37%
2 Other Sources	25%
3 Patriot Job Web	12%
4 A professor	8%
5 Bulletin Board/Flyer	8%
6 A friend	6%
7 Financial Aid Office/Counselor	4%
Total	100%

3. On-campus Jobs that Students Would Like to See Available

In the comment section, the following jobs are most frequently mentioned by working and non-working sophomores as on-campus jobs they would like to see available.

- Jobs related to their majors: working in a lab, professor's research assistant, teaching assistant, jobs in the department or program offices
- Jobs that give students hands-on experiences related to their future careers: nursing-related jobs, medical-field jobs for pre-med students, finance, EMT, IT service, police, etc.
- Clerical /administrative jobs: Clerical/administrative positions in campus offices; working at the library.
- Other jobs: Food services, maintenance, gym, etc.

VII. Implications

In the 2014 Strategic Plan, Mason set forth an action to provide students with more on-campus job opportunities to draw residential and academic life closer together and promote student engagement in on-campus life. The survey results summarized in this report highlighted that residential sophomores prefer on-campus jobs to off-campus jobs, but accessibility and availability of those jobs need improvement. Based on the survey results, the following are some implications:

- **High Desirability of On-Campus Jobs.** Both working and non-working residential sophomores chose hourly wage and impact on academic performance as the most important factors when considering a position for pay. Although on-campus jobs were perceived to pay less than off-campus jobs, a large majority of residential sophomores still prefer on campus jobs. Attractiveness of on-campus opportunities may be enhanced by accentuating the financial savings over commuting to off-campus sites. Flexible work schedules available for many on-campus jobs might have a positive impact on academic performance.
- **Accessibility: Centralization of on-campus job advertising and streamlining the student hiring process.** Students may benefit from a centralized online information center for on-campus job opportunities and clear guidelines to ensure a fair and equitable hiring process for student workers. Although the University Career Services maintains a website for on-campus job listings, many units do not advertise their job openings there. Should on-campus jobs be advertised at a central place? What types of jobs? What would it take to develop an effective online information center? What is an effective hiring process for student workers?
- **Availability: Creative solutions to increasing on-campus student jobs.** A majority of the survey respondents did not think there were enough on-campus jobs. To increase on-campus job opportunities, creative solutions should be explored at Mason. Some higher education institutions in the nation are implementing unique programs to provide undergraduate students with professional experiences while contributing to budget savings for the institutions. For example, Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee hires undergraduates as "student associates" to fill positions that would benefit both students and the college. Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia has a group of students for on-campus technical support in exchange for free room and board². Other models include University of Maryland's President's Promise <http://www.presidentspromise.umd.edu/>. There may be a new creative solution that fits Mason's organizational structure and budget constraints.

² Bushong, Steven. 2009a. "Rhodes's Work Program Gives Students Experience and Saves the College Money." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 55(35), A22, May 8. Bushong, Steven. 2009b. "Longwood U. Puts Students' Tech Savvy to Work." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 55(35), A22, May 8. The articles are available at <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v55/i35/35a02201.htm> and <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v55/i35/35a02202.htm>.