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# Work-School Conflict and Work School Enrichment: A Student's Perspective on Taking on Multiple Roles Through On-campus and Off-campus Employment

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Work-School Conflict and Work-School Enrichment:  
A Student's Perspective on Taking on Multiple Roles  
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## Abstract

This study investigated how the location of employment, on or off-campus, may affect student experiences of negative and positive spillover from the work role to the academic role. It was hypothesized that work-to-school conflict (WSC) would be positively associated with the number of hours devoted to the employment role. Beyond that, it was hypothesized that both WSC and work-to-school enrichment (WSE) would be greater for students who are employed in off-campus jobs as opposed to students who work in on-campus positions. In addition, it was hypothesized that negative and positive spillover from work roles to school roles will contribute to students' attitudes toward their jobs. Specifically, it was hypothesized that there will be a significant negative association between job satisfaction and WSC and a significant positive association between job satisfaction and WSE. Employed students recruited from undergraduate students at a public university in the northeastern United States were invited to take an online survey regarding various aspects of the work-school interface. A sample of 79 eligible participants reported their perceptions and attitudes toward taking on work roles while enrolled in classes. As hypothesized, work hours were positively correlated with WSC, and students who worked off-campus reported higher levels of WSC than those who worked on-campus. Furthermore, job satisfaction was negatively correlated with WSC and positively correlated with WSE. Locus of employment was unrelated to experiences of WSE. These findings have implications for the design of jobs aimed at student workers and effective counseling for students who need to balance their academic responsibilities with part-time or full-time employment.

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An increasing number of university students take part in part-time or full-time employment. Psychologists have observed that in the past twenty some years, there has been an increase in the number of students who work their way through college (Orszeg, Orszeg & Whitmore, 2001). Between 2003-2004, 70-80% of college students -- regardless of race, gender, income or educational status -- worked while they attended college (Kings, 2006), and current economic conditions suggest that this trend is likely to continue. The increased propensity of university students to be employed while they are enrolled in classes makes it important to investigate the consequences of working while in college.

In particular, the problem of working while attending school brings several questions to mind. For example, how does taking on multiple roles (e.g., an academic role and an employment role) affect students' lives? Does employment always interfere with the academic role? Can some forms of employment be perceived as enriching the student role? What features of the employment role contribute to positive and negative spillover into a student's academic role?

To address some of these questions, I investigated negative and positive role spillover from the work role into the student role, as well as factors that may be associated with the nature and extent of work-to-school spillover. Although various determinants of the work-school interface may positively or negatively affect a student's ability to carry out his/her academic role, the location of employment is one factor that has not been attended to in prior research. In the current study, I argue that location of employment has implications for both negative and

positive spillover from the work role to the school role, and it serves as the focal variable in the current study.

### *Why Students Work While Attending College*

There are many contributing factors to students' decisions to work while attending college. Some students want to gain work experience with the available time their class schedule provides them, others may want to make extra spending money for the semester, or meet new people. The work role may be thought of as a semi-discretionary additional role for students with these motives for employment. It provides the opportunity to enrich a student's social life and offers the possibility of long-term rewards in the form of resume-building experiences.

However, not all students work to gain some work experience for a resume, make a little cash or to meet new people. For many students, working while attending college is a matter of financial necessity. Currently, many college students face economic hardships that previous generations did not experience. The basic financial requirements of receiving a college education, including tuition, fees, room and board, text books and meal plans continue to rise. For example, tuition, fees and textbook prices rose 200% from 1986-2004 (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2004). Not only are prices increasing, but the economy has been decreasing, making it very difficult for families to find the resources to provide their children with an advanced education. Financial aid and parental assistance is not always enough to cover these expenses for the average student (Orszeg, Orszeg & Whitman, 2001). Thus, many students have to find other means to accommodate the financial burden of maintaining their student status. As a result, financial necessity motivates many part-time and full-time students to take jobs that they carry out in concert with their academic responsibilities. This leaves students to carry out the responsibilities of receiving a college education while maintaining the financial

necessities to complete the process. For such students, the work role is not really discretionary; it is a means of maintaining the student role.

*Work-School Conflict (WSC) and Work-School Enrichment (WSE)*

The two components under discussion, the work role and the school role, each have benefits and requirements. When the two roles are carried out simultaneously, there is the possibility of spillover from one role to the other; this can have both positive and negative consequences. Spillover can be in the form of interference with the other role or in the form of benefits (“enrichments”) that accrue to the other role. Positive and negative role spillover between work and other important life domains is a concept that has been studied extensively with respect to the work-family interface, in the form of work-to-family conflict (WFC) and work-to-family enrichment (WFE). Although it has not been studied as extensively, the same conceptual structure has been applied to the intersection of the work and school roles. Work-school conflict (WSC) and work-school enrichment (WSE) are concepts that closely resemble those describing the spillover effects from work to family.

WSC refers to situations in which work conflicts with the family role and school role, mainly for university students, based on the pressures and obligations from each domain (Gareis, Barnett, Ertel & Berkman, 2009). Specifically, WSC refers to participation in the role of work resulting in stress, scheduling constraints, and interference with performance in the school domain.

Similarly, parallels can be drawn between WSE and WFE. If participation in one role positively influences the other role, then it can be considered as inspiring. Consequently, WSE can be defined as positive experiences and performance in the work role that help generate similar positive influences in another domain, such as school (Powell & Greenhaus, 2006).

Outcomes of WSE may include increased communication skills, interpersonal skills and/or specific disciplinary skills.

*Impact of Participation in the Work Role: Number of Hours Employed*

The amount of time and effort a job may take out of a student's schedule may hinder their attendance towards the responsibilities for their academics. For example, if students devote too much time to meet the needs of their job schedule, they may be vulnerable to spending insufficient time on their academic responsibilities. For instance, an employed student may find it difficult to attend class regularly and complete the necessary schoolwork that each class requires. In a previous study (Orszag, Orszag & Whitmore, 2001), working 35 hours or more per week was shown to negatively affect academic performance in 55% of students. Furthermore, students reported limited availability when choosing classes for enrollment, less time to access the library and difficulty in scheduling their responsibilities. Thus, based on the expectation that time spent in the work role will interfere will make less time available to carry out the school role, it is expected that the number of hours worked per week will be positively associated with perceived WSC.

Hypothesis 1: The number of hours worked per week will be positively correlated with  
WSC

*On-Campus vs. Off-Campus Employment*

The location of employment may also play an important role in a students' perceptions of how much conflict and enrichment they experience from their employment. In particular, one potentially relevant feature of student jobs is whether they are a form of on-campus or off-campus employment. Most students who go to medium or large universities live on or near their college campus. On-campus jobs allow for easy access to the employment location, minimizing

time conflicts associated with travel between work and school. In addition, on-campus employment work schedules are often designed to accommodate students' class schedules, whereas off-campus jobs often require the student to adapt his or her schedule to the needs of the employer. Clearly this introduces a risk of increased conflict for a student and a potential threat to academic performance. In addition, many on-campus jobs are characterized by fairly minimal requirements and responsibilities, thus making it easy for students to be able to complete other school work (sometimes even while at work). Examples of these jobs include sitting at an office or front desk, working at cafes, computer work and athletic department jobs, often at minimum wage. Also, most shifts consist of two to four hours during the day as opposed to shifts of five to six hours. Taken collectively, this suggests that they have less potential for negative spillover to the school role than off-campus jobs are likely to have.

Although on-campus jobs may not cause as much conflict with a student's academic responsibilities, they may also offer fewer avenues for enrichment of the school role. Off-campus jobs, which may include working in a hospital, waitressing, working with animals, retail sales, and other possibilities, typically provide exposure to a broader variety of people and situations. This can enhance a student's communication and interpersonal skills, and depending on what their occupation entitles, possibly enhanced skills in their academic field of discipline. The challenges of managing off-campus employment may require students to develop more self-management skills, which can pay off in the academic sphere. In addition, off-campus positions sometimes provide professional development opportunities that can pay long-term career benefits. Other benefits reaped from working off-campus include (sometimes) higher pay level, expanding one's social network, and experiencing different types of occupations. In summary,



off-campus employment should produce more positive spillover to the school role than on-campus employment produces.

Hypothesis 2a: Students employed in off-campus employment will report higher levels of WSC than students employed in on-campus employment report.

Hypothesis 2b: Students employed in off-campus employment will report higher levels of WSE than students employed in on-campus employment report.

### *Consequences of Work-Role Spillover for Work Attitudes*

Role spillover from the work role to the school role may also have consequences for the way students evaluate their jobs. For example, students whose jobs create substantial WSC are likely to “blame” the job to some extent for the stress that it creates in the school role. This should be reflected in lower levels of job satisfaction. This tendency to evaluate the source of work-nonwork conflict more negatively has been reported in research on the work-family interface (Johnson, 2010). Likewise, jobs that provide enrichment in the school domain may be seen as more desirable because of the “extra” benefits that they provide. Thus, following this logic, both WSC and WSE should contribute to job satisfaction. Specifically, WSC should be negatively associated with job satisfaction and WSE should be positively associated with job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: WSC and WSE will account for significant variance in job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3a: There will be a significant negative association between job satisfaction and WSC.

Hypothesis 3b: There will be a significant positive association between job satisfaction and WSE.

To test these hypotheses, I conducted an online survey of employed students at the University of Connecticut, who reported their experiences of the challenges, benefits, and outcomes of working while attending school.

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were part-time and full-time undergraduate students at the University of Connecticut who were invited to complete an anonymous online survey concerning their school and work experiences. Recruitment procedures consisted of information sheet handouts at the public student union, as well as e-mail invitations. E-mail addresses were selected at random from the University of Connecticut Directory to invite students to participate in an online survey. Participants were informed that their participation would be anonymous and that they could withdraw from the survey at any time. They were also informed that the survey would take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete and there was no compensation for their time. Reading the information sheet or the e-mail invitation provided informed consent.

A total of 430 invitations were either handed out to employed students or sent through e-mail and 87 students responded by submitting a survey (response rate of 20%). To be eligible for this study, students had to be enrolled in classes while employed full-time or part-time in on or off-campus employment. Of the 87 individuals who submitted surveys, 79 completed the survey and were eligible, while 8 were disqualified from the survey because of ineligibility or high levels of missing data

On average, respondents were 20 years old and worked 11 hours per week. In addition, 32% of the respondents were male and 84% were white. Of the total participants, 19% were

freshmen, 15% were sophomores, 30% were juniors and 35% were seniors. Only 1.3% of the students were married and 34% were 1<sup>st</sup> generation students getting a degree.

### *Measures*

Unless otherwise indicated, participants were asked to indicate agreement with each item using a 5-point response scale (1 Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree, or 1 = never, 5 = always). Measures consisted of work hours, credit hours enrolled in school, job satisfaction, work-school conflict and work-school enrichment. Demographics were also requested at the participant's discretion. All items used to measure variables in the study can be found in the Appendix.

*Work Hours.* This variable was assessed by asking respondents to report the average number of hours they worked per week.

*Work-School Conflict.* WSC was measured with four items that evaluate how people who work and attend school experience conflict from their job interfering with their academic life. WSC was computed using three items from a measure developed by Markel and Frone (1998), and a single item from Thomas & Ganster (1995, as cited by Fields, 2002, p.201). The four items were averaged to form a composite WSC variable. Coefficient alpha for the 4 item scale was .94. An example item is "My work schedule often conflicts with my academic responsibilities."

*Work-School Enrichment.* WSE was measured with three items that assess benefits of partaking in multiple roles for keeping up with academic responsibilities and enhancing skills and abilities that have future career benefits. One item was drawn from the 1977 Quality of Employment Study (Quinn & Staines, 1979), one item was from a scale developed by Stephens & Sommer (1996, as cited by Fields, 2002, p.214) and a third item was developed for this study.

The three items were averaged to form a composite WSE variable. Coefficient alpha for the 3 item scale was .80. An example item is “The problem solving approaches I use in my job are effective in resolving problems outside of work.”

*Job Satisfaction.* Participants reported their job satisfaction by answering four questions regarding how satisfied they were with their current job. Job satisfaction was assessed with 1 item from Camman, Fichman, Jenkins & Klesh (1983 as cited by Fields, 2002, p5) and 3 items from Cook, Hepworth, Wall & Warr (1981 as cited by Fields, 2002 p.17). After reverse coding one of the items (“I definitely dislike my job” was changed reversed into “I definitely like my job”), the 4 items were averaged to form a composite Job Satisfaction measure (JOBSAT, Cronbach’s alpha =.86). An example item is “All in all, I am satisfied with my job.”

*Demographics and Control Variables.* Participants were asked to report their gender, age, ethnic background, year in college, marital status and whether or not they are a first generation student getting a degree. In addition, they reported number of enrolled credits this semester, which was used as a control variable to statistically control for school work load.

## **Results**

Means, standard deviations, coefficient alphas and inter-correlations for all variables are presented in Table 1. The internal consistency reliability coefficients acceptable (coefficient alpha .80 or higher) for all the multi-item measures are listed. The average number of hours worked per week was 11.91. Negative work-to-school spillover (WSC) and positive work-to-school spillover (WSE) was both moderate. On a scale of 1 to 5, WSC had a mean of a little less than the midpoint of the scale (2.34), while WSE had a mean slightly above the midpoint of the scale (3.41).

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables**

Variable	Mean	SD	WSC	WSE	Hours Worked	Job Satisfaction
WSC	2.34	.96	.94			
WSE	3.41	1.06	-.12	.80		
Hours Worked	11.91	6.44	.51**	.08	----	
Job Satisfaction	4.27	.73	-.47**	.57**	-.08	.86

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$ . Coefficient alpha for all multi-item measures is shown in the diagonal.

Hypothesis 1 stated that the number of hours worked per week would be positively correlated with WSC. As hypothesized, the number of hours per week worked was positively correlated with WSC ( $r = .51, p < .01$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

It was also hypothesized that WSC would be greater in students employed in off-campus employment than students who work on-campus (Hypothesis 2a). An ANCOVA was conducted to assess the relationship between employment location and the dependent variable WSC. Hours worked per week and credit hours were included as covariates to statistically control for differences in employment work load and school work load. In the analysis, hours per week worked had a significant covariate effect on reported WSC ( $F(1, 79) = 13.19, p < .001$ ). Unlike work hours, there was no significant covariate effect for number of credit hours ( $F(1, 79) = .04, p > .05$ ). As predicted, employment location had a significant effect on reported WSC ( $F(1, 79) = 6.92, p < .01$ ). As hypothesized, participants working off-campus reported more WSC ( $M=3.27, SD=1.12$ ) than participants working on-campus ( $M=2.13, SD=.79$ ), with an effect size of .15. Therefore, Hypothesis 2a was supported.

Likewise, it was hypothesized that WSE would be greater in students employed off-campus than students who worked on-campus (Hypothesis 2b). To test Hypothesis 2b, an ANCOVA was conducted with WSE as the dependent variable and location of employment (on campus vs. off-campus) as the predictor, with the number of hours worked and number of credits enrolled in at the university again included as covariates to statistically control their effects. When WSE was the dependent variable, neither the number of hours worked nor the number of credit hours had significant covariate effects ( $p > .05$ ). Furthermore, contrary to my hypothesis, location of employment did not have a significant effect on WSE. Participants who worked off-campus ( $M = 3.11, SD = 1.18$ ) did not experience significantly more WSE than participants who worked on-campus ( $M = 3.48, SD = 1.03; F(1, 79) = 1.80, p > .05$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 2b was not supported.

To test Hypothesis 3, which stated that WSC and WSE will account for significant variance in job satisfaction, a multiple regression analysis was conducted in which job satisfaction was the dependent variable and WSC and WSE were included as predictors of job satisfaction. As hypothesized, WSC and WSE did account for significant variance in job satisfaction, with an adjusted R squared of .41 ( $F(2, 74) = 27.8, p < .00$ ). Standardized regression weights for WSC and WSE were examined to test Hypotheses 3a and 3b, respectively. Consistent with Hypothesis 3a, which stated that there would be a significant negative association between job satisfaction and WSC, the standardized regression weight for WSC was  $-.38$  ( $t(2, 74) = -4.26, p < .00$ ). Consistent with Hypothesis 3b, which stated that WSE would be positively associated with job satisfaction, the standardized regression weight for WSE was  $+.50$  ( $t(2, 74) = 5.71, p < .00$ ). Therefore, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were both supported.

## Discussion

This field study was conducted to investigate whether the number of hours worked per week and the location of student employment affect work-school conflict and work-school enrichment in university students, and in turn how WSC and WSE are associated with attitudes that students have about their jobs. Findings from this study, which was conducted with students who are currently working while they attend college, supported four of the five proposed hypotheses. In particular, location of employment and number of hours worked affect the perceived conflict that employed students experience; the number of hours per week worked and employment in an off-campus setting are both associated with higher levels of WSC.

The positive correlation between the number of hours per week worked and WSC is not terribly surprising if we recognize that time is a valued and limited resource. It has been noted in previous research that participation in work may make it difficult for an individual to participate in other roles, such as school because they find less time and energy to take on the responsibilities when combining multiple roles (Adebayo, Sunmola and Udegbe, 2008). Findings from the current study suggest that students who dedicate more time to their job will have limited availability for their academic responsibilities and will need to make difficult choices about whether to devote limited resources to their jobs or to their coursework. This finding reflects and extends previous research studies by Orzag, Orzag & Whitmore (2001), who reported that students who worked more hours (such as over 35 hours), were negatively affected academically. These findings are also consistent with work by Markel and Frone (1997), who concluded that “employment among full-time students may negatively affect academic achievement by increasing exposure to various job characteristics and consequently work-school conflict (pp. 283).”

It should also be considered that off-campus employment, which was associated with higher levels of work-school conflict, may as a result influence students' academic efforts and performance. This has implications for recommendations to students about the kinds of school-year employment to seek and for recommendations to colleges about making on-campus work opportunities available to their students when possible. If working on-campus is less conflicting towards academics than off-campus employment, universities should try to increase the on-campus employment openings to meet the needs of more students. Taking this into recognition, universities and researchers should focus on developing other job opportunities on-campus such as receptionists, phone-a-thons callers, or service jobs. Understanding that money is a limited and valuable resource, college campuses could advertise nearby off-campus employment such as tanning salons, food stores or nearby shops that may interest students who do not receive any school funding for student employment.

More generally, researchers should focus on understanding the impact of conflict and enrichment that employment may have on a students' education and experiences (McNall & Michel, 2010). Undergraduate students have reported their thoughts on scheduling, conflict and satisfaction of the average "college student lifestyle," and as researchers, it must be understood that further steps must be taken to accommodate working students to enhance their total academic and college experience. This does not imply that it is always desirable to decrease the challenges that come along with working as a student, not does it depreciate the long term effects that work may have for enhancing organizational and time management skills. Rather the goal should be to ensure that employment enhances these skills rather than having employment become a hindrance to a student's academic performance.



Turning to a consideration of the implications that work-based conflicts with the school role and enrichments of the student role might have for students' employment experiences, results also supported hypotheses that that job satisfaction would be negatively associated with WSC and positively associated with WSE. This suggests that the conflicts and enrichments they experience in the work-school interface may influence the attitudes students hold towards their jobs. This extends prior research that conflict between work and other responsibilities makes a difference in terms of job satisfaction (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). For savvy employers who recognize the value of satisfied employees, this is information that should not be ignored.

#### *Limitations of Current Research*

One limitation for this project was its association with only one college campus. This restricts the range of students and types of jobs available. Other college campuses may provide other types of employment on-campus than the University of Connecticut provides. Therefore, it may not be possible to generalize these findings well to other college populations.

Also, the University of Connecticut, as stated before, is a medium-large sized university in a rural environment. The quality and types of job opportunities near or around the campus may differ from those of a small sized college community. To investigate this further, the survey should be distributed among more than one university to multiple populations of students.

Another limitation of this study was a lack of compensation to participate in the online survey. No money or class credit was used in the recruitment process for this particular study and it may have affected the response rate of the online survey. This may have reduced the response rate, and it is unknown whether there are differences between employed students who agreed to participate and those who elected not to complete the survey. One outcome of the low

response rate was a relatively small sample size, which limited the statistical power to test hypotheses in the study.

One other limitation of this study concerns the correlational data that were used to test the hypotheses. None of the predictor variables in the study were manipulated. Instead, the study used a cross-sectional field survey design in which students reported on their current work arrangements and their current levels of WSC, WSE and job satisfaction. With this kind of research design, it is not possible to draw causal inferences about the data. For example, it is possible that students who have high levels of WSC self-select into off-campus employment. We also can not draw causal inferences about the direction of the relationships between WSC, WSE and job satisfaction. Other research suggests that WSC influences job satisfaction, but it is also possible that how satisfying students' jobs are influences their perceptions of whether the jobs interfere with and enrich their student experiences. With this kind of cross-sectional correlational design used in this study, it is not possible to determine which of these is the correct interpretation.

#### *Future Directions in Research*

Through these investigations we were able to better understand how students perceive taking on multiple responsibilities such as classes and working. The results of this study indicate that additional research can provide a better understanding of whether the location of employment interferes with work-school conflict and work-school enrichment, as well as other factors that play a role within the work-school domain. For future examinations in the work-school interface, studies should expand their research to a broader range of types of college campus environments. Larger colleges may provide a wider variety of students and jobs compared to smaller universities. College campuses that are located near major cities have a

wider variety of job opportunities that are near the campus that many undergraduate students could have access too. For instance, follow-up analyses indicated that older UConn students reported more WSE than younger students, which suggests that they were able to find jobs perceived as more enriching and more satisfying than less advanced students. Also, in regards to expanding this study and survey to other college campus sizes, we could identify the frequency and types of jobs each type of campus has to offer and its nearby communities.

Another way to effectively develop a stronger research study is to distribute the survey to universities where expenses vary as well in addition to the location of the university. For example, the types of jobs available nearby or on campus in a city or urban area may be significantly different than those in a rural or sub-urban area. Also, public and private universities differ in the amount of funding, scholarships and loans they provide to their accepted students. In addition to those suggestions, to attract more participants, some type of compensation should be utilized so that participants benefit in taking this survey. If future studies are capable of providing some sort of compensation, it would be highly recommended to do so.

Finally, future research should focus on conceptualizing and assessing the work characteristics of on-campus and off-campus jobs. This would allow a clearer identification of which features (e.g. scheduling flexibility, proximity, work demands, skill requirements) contribute most to WSC and WSE for working students.

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## Appendix

### Items Used to Assess Key Variables

#### Number of Hours Worked Per Week Item

1. My job has a lot of responsibility

#### School Performance and School Work Load Items

1. How many credit hours are you enrolled in this semester?

#### Job Satisfaction Items

1. I am proud to be working for my employer
2. All in all, I am satisfied with my job
3. I am satisfied with my job for the time being
4. I definitely dislike my job

#### Work-School Conflict Items

1. Because of my job, I go to classes tired
2. My job demands and responsibilities interfere with my school work
3. I spend less time studying and doing homework because of my job
4. My work schedule often conflicts with my academic responsibilities

#### Work-School Enrichment Items

1. The problem solving approaches I use in my job are effective in resolving problems outside of work
2. My job allows for open opportunities to learn and improve skills and abilities
3. My job lets me use skills and abilities that I am able to use towards future career goals