

January 1999

## Higher Education Students' Off-Campus Work Patterns

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 1998 session, legislators examined the Washington State Need Grant program and the increasing loan debts of students in higher education institutions. As a next step to understanding how students pay for college, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy was directed to compile information on students who worked while enrolled in a post-secondary institution.<sup>1</sup> Enrolled students were defined as resident undergraduates who were pursuing a degree or certificate and attending college in the winter of 1997 or in the winter of 1998. This study is the first comprehensive look at reviewing the off-campus<sup>2</sup> employment status of students attending colleges and universities across the state. The key findings are summarized below. References to earnings, hours worked, and pay per hour have been calculated using medians.

#### Profile of Working Students

- Sixty-nine percent of Washington's higher education winter-enrolled students worked off-campus during some part of the 1996-97 school year.<sup>3</sup>
- Of those students who worked, 17 percent worked full-time.
- The five major non-college employers were eating and drinking establishments, health services, business services, education services, and miscellaneous retail.
- The largest category of employers for students, eating and drinking establishments, had one of the lowest hourly pay rates.

#### Work Patterns Based on Student Characteristics and Institution Attended

- Proportionately, more students in community and technical colleges (63 percent) worked in off-campus employment than students in four-year institutions (49 percent).
- Although students in community and technical colleges had higher earnings due to more hours worked than students in four-year institutions, they had lower pay per hour unless they were enrolled part-time and working.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 608(5) of the Supplemental Appropriations Act for 1998 states that "\$35,000 of the general fund appropriation for fiscal year 1999 is provided solely for the Washington institute for public policy to conduct a study of college student's employment. The study shall include, but not be limited to, matching student enrollment information with unemployment insurance information. The office of financial management, higher education coordinating board, state board for community and technical colleges, and the employment security department shall assist the institute in the performance of the study. Results of the study are to be reported to the legislature by January 15, 1999."

<sup>2</sup> Off-campus employment included off-campus federal and state Work Study financial aid, which was 6 percent of the total off-campus work.

<sup>3</sup> Summer employment was not a part of this study.

- Students enrolled in branch campuses had higher earnings, higher pay per hour, and worked more hours than students enrolled on the main campus of research institutions.
- Students in four-year institutions who were juniors and seniors had higher earnings, higher pay per hour, and worked more hours than freshmen and sophomores.

### **Impact of Work on Student Performance**

- In terms of reenrollment for the following year, no meaningful differences were found between four-year school students who worked and did not work.
- No meaningful differences were found in the number of hours that students worked and their grade point averages (GPAs).

### **Off-Campus Employment and Financial Aid**

- Off-campus employment was the major financial source for most students (excluding parental support).
- Eighty-five percent of all the enrolled students received financial aid and/or worked in off-campus employment.
- Students who worked off campus and received need-based financial aid were able to cover 75 percent or more of their cost of college attendance.