

## CHAPTER 9

# UPS Study Relates Student Employment to Job Hunting Success After Graduation

---

*Robert Foreman*

Of the 314 million Americans aged 16 to 24 years in 1990, 15.2 million were enrolled in either college or high school. Logic would seem to indicate that their reason for being in school is to attain an education—specifically an education that would, upon graduation, assist in their pursuit of employment. In support of this assumption, UCLA Professor Alexander Astin has surveyed incoming freshmen since 1967, and has consistently found that the number one reason students attend college is to get a better job.

But what factors make some graduates more attractive than others in the eyes of potential employers? Certainly a specialized degree in a field that is in demand makes the job-hunting task less difficult. But what other attributes can the graduate-applicant bring to the table in his or her search for employment?

Two of these attributes immediately come to mind. The first is grade point average (GPA). This measure of performance has traditionally been perceived by students, and their parents, as a benchmark for interviewers in predicting the future success of a potential employee.

However, its importance among employers may be overstated when compared to the second obvi-

ous attribute—previous work experience. Has the applicant accepted the responsibility of employment while attending school? How has he or she performed in these prior work assignments?

Of these two predictors of success, GPA and work experience, which carries the most weight with employers? To answer that question, the corporate Human Resources department of United Parcel Service surveyed a variety of companies through out the nation to examine the impact that part-time student employment has on full-time employment opportunities after graduation. Of the 2,000 surveys distributed to human resources professionals from a wide variety of fields, 1,201 were completed and returned.

### **To Hire or Not To Hire?**

Survey participants were asked to respond to the following question: How much consideration does an employer place upon part-time work experience when hiring a college graduate for his or her first full-time professional or managerial position?

Of the survey participants, 77% stated that they often consider or strongly consider previous

part-time employment when hiring for the above positions. The response strongly indicates that part-time work adds to the employment profile of a college graduate, and often is a determining factor for the Human Resources professional making the selection.

In the following section, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements put forth. Almost 89% disagreed or strongly disagreed with grade point average being the single most important criterion for selection of a college graduate, and almost 86% agreed or strongly agreed that *part-time work experience can be considered as important as grade point average*. These results clearly support the premise that work experience combined with above average grades is more attractive to potential employers than excellent grades alone.

An overwhelming 94% of the survey respondents indicate that, given two applicants with equal academic qualifications, they would select the candidate with part-time work experience over one without work experience.

### **Experience the Best Teacher?**

In addition to determining if human resources professionals valued part-time work experience, the survey attempted to identify why they might place a value on that experience. To that end, survey participants were asked to agree or disagree with a number of statements regarding work performance.

Among participants, 62% believed that *graduates with part-time work experience produced higher quality work than those with no work experience* in their first professional position. More than two-thirds of the survey respondents—68%—believe that graduates with part-time work experience accept supervision and direction more willingly than those without prior work experience, and 66% believe that graduates with work experience demonstrate better time management skills.

Almost 65% of the survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that graduates with previous work experience are better able to interact with coworkers on team projects than are graduates with no work experience.

Two additional questions were asked to gather opinions on the value of work experience in enhancing a graduate's ability to make a quick transition from college to the full-time work environment.

Over 91% of the human resources managers responding agreed or strongly agreed that work experience enabled the graduates to make a more rapid transition, and 89% agreed or strongly agreed that graduates with part-time work experience have more realistic expectations of their employers than do those without work experience.

### **Logic Prevails**

From the survey results, it is apparent that human resources professionals believe that *part-time work experience enhances a graduate's potential work to employers—giving him or her an edge in obtaining career oriented employment. They also believe that candidates with work experience produce better results, more quickly, than do their counterparts with no work experience. Other studies also indicate that students who worked part-time while attending school receive higher earnings—particularly in the first five years after graduation.*

So, in the opinions of the 1,201 survey respondents, regarding the question of whether work experience is an advantage for graduates seeking full-time jobs, it seems that logic prevails. Potential employers believe that work during college provides significant benefits to students who are willing to undertake the experience.

### **About the Survey**

In 1991, Bob Foreman of the corporate Human Resources Department of United Parcel Service conducted a nationwide survey of 2,000 Human Resources managers, who were selected randomly from the 1990 Directory of Human Resources Professionals. Of the 2,000 surveys originally distributed, 1,201 were completed and returned, 728 elicited no response, and 71 were returned as undeliverable. The result was a 62% return of the surveys actually received by the human resources managers.

The respondents were asked to identify the classification that best described their business, and

to note the total number of employees at their company.

The manufacturing industry represented the largest single group of respondents, at 40% of the total. But a wide variety of other fields, including food services, computer services, utilities, wholesale trade, retail sales, banking and financial services, transportation, insurance, and educational services reflected 60% of the survey's input.

The survey responses also reflected variety in terms of size of company. The most responses, 23%, were received from companies with 1,000 to 10,000 employees, and approximately 8.5% came from human resources professionals representing companies with 10,000 or more employees. Companies of less than 1,000 employees accounted for 68.5% of the responses.

This diversity among the companies responding to the survey would indicate that, although more extensive and sophisticated study may be required to draw definitive conclusions, there exists a broad-based group of hiring professionals that places a high value on the student who works while attending college.

---

### *Robert Foreman*

Bob Foreman is the corporate Workforce Planning manager for United Parcel Service of America, Inc. In this role he deals extensively with student employment issues and develops strategic recruitment and employment practices for the UPS organization. He has long been an advocate and beneficiary of the student work experience; starting work while in high school and working his way through college to obtain his degree in Human Resource Management. He is well recognized by college job placement counselors from his work with the National Student Employment Association.