

Student Employment Questionnaire, spring 2001
Division of Student Affairs, UNC-CH
A Summary of Learning Outcomes

In addition to providing needed monies to supplement the income of undergraduate and graduate students, what useful skills or experiences do those Student Affairs jobs offer to students? How do these jobs prepare them for the future, and what skills are taught or strengthened? A survey conducted spring 2001 of seventy-eight student employees within the Division of Student Affairs sought to answer such queries. This compilation of thirty questions captured a snapshot of a rather pluralistic group of students working successfully with one another and their peers. Though this particular sample was rather unbalanced across gender lines (72% female, 28% male), it does constitute a rather racially heterogeneous group (21% African American, 5% Asian, 3% Multi-Racial, 71% White/Non-Hispanic) which pulls from all academic years (16% freshmen, 24% sophomores, 29% juniors, 24% seniors, 7% graduate students). To their average 13.72 hrs/wk on the job, this group of experienced workers (only 5% having never before had a job) bring an array of experiences with positions as diverse as sales associate, secretary, file clerk, restaurant manager, camp counselor, and lab worker. Though motivated by financial concerns in the main (96%), as well as items they can use to flesh out their resumes (63%), students also seek experience (71%), the kind that constitutes real learning and that will impact their performance in those professions they later choose. Apparently, those surveyed indeed tend to find the experiences they seek in the Division of Student Affairs.

After an average 11.14 months on the job, these students can speak relatively knowledgeably about their present positions. Most have enjoyed a positive experience overall, considering themselves well-trained and encouraged to achieve the goals set before them in a community of supportive peers and employers who sometimes double as mentors. In such an atmosphere that combines support with new challenges, skills have been honed, useful facts obtained, and many lessons learned. To the question, "Are you learning useful skills that may be carried out in a job after graduation?", 72% reported acquiring new leadership skills, 69% office procedures skills, and 53% computer skills. 29% of respondents listed and described a variety of skills under the open-ended option "other," responses worth looking at in detail.

Some student workers report gaining knowledge specific to certain disciplines and professions, skills and facts that will directly assist them after college. Included in such a list is an increased awareness of University rules, procedures, expected conduct and discipline. Others cite the accumulation of knowledge concerning health education, counseling, public relations, customer service, telephone skills, and public relations, while still others report enriching office interactions with visitors, new skills useful in a pharmaceutical environment, and an intimate understanding of human resources policies and procedures. More generally, students point to increased organization and planning skills, the importance of coping with new responsibilities, and the necessity of learning to work productively with different kinds of people.

In addition to such an increasing appreciation of diversity as present amidst their peers, students report other people skills obtained while working for the Division of Student Affairs. One student reflects:

I think that the most valuable skill that I have learned has been figuring out how people function. I have learned to handle people

under all kinds of different situations, and I think that experience will help me more than anything as a teacher.

The data reveals such increased knowledge in the hands of student after student, some mentioning the importance of delegating responsibilities to others, others speaking more generally of teamwork skills gained. Frequent reiterations of familiar terms “teamwork” and “communication skills” appear alongside more situation-specific phrases like “building management,” “meditation group interaction,” and “team management skills.” An entire third of the respondents explicitly mentioned either personal, interpersonal, or customer service skills that were refined as a result of their jobs in the Division of Student Affairs.

Even more important, perhaps, has been increased familiarity with conflict resolution and problem solving in the midst of tense interpersonal situations, those conflicts that arise inevitably in the best of working environments. Though not all resolutions have been easy, 20% of those students sampled appreciated the opportunity to practice some form of conflict management or interpersonal problem-solving skills. Such situations and their resolution complement those smoother, more enjoyable learning moments, suggesting that the Division of Student Affairs at UNC-CH fosters growth in an environment akin to that students will face when they graduate and must deal with the vicissitudes as well as the pleasures of pursuing their dreams alongside those of differing viewpoints.

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