

University examines its student employment program to better align it with essential learning outcomes

by Jaime Hunt - Monday, December 14, 2009

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Two University of Wisconsin Oshkosh graduate students funded through the University's innovative Student Titan Employment Program (STEP) are undertaking a study of the campus's student employment practices this winter.

The goal of the study is to further understand how to thoughtfully and systematically modify student employment to offer students greater engagement and to provide additional high-impact learning opportunities. The University is among the first in the nation to perform a comprehensive evaluation of its student employment practices in search of additional educational benefits.

"Every institution employs a significant number of students; however, not many examine their employment program with the goal of creating enhanced learning opportunities for students," said Chancellor Richard H. Wells. "We've surveyed the literature and best practices on student employment to find new ways to maximize student engagement and retention and add cognitive value to student employment. A set of rubrics that reflect broadly shared criteria and performance levels for assessing student learning is available from the AAC&U VALUE (<http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/index.cfm>). We will use the results of our assessment to improve student employment practices on campus."

Ultimately, all campus employers will be asked to be more aware of the student learning outcomes identified by the Liberal Education Reform Team and UWO faculty as essential: identification and objective evaluation of theories and assumptions; critical and creative thinking; written and oral communication; quantitative literacy; technology and information literacy; and teamwork, leadership, and problem solving. Campus employers will be asked to articulate how their experiences enhance a liberal education by identifying which of the essential outcomes will be learned during the experience.

"Even positions not presently identified as 'high impact' can contribute to a liberal education in some way," said Wells. "The idea is to help those employers identify how their positions impact students' learning. We tend to think all learning goes on in the classroom, however, every employment experience offers an opportunity to challenge ourselves to offer high-impact experiences that will provide opportunities to gain increased mastery of essential learning outcomes."

The campus currently employs about 1,650 students; About 110 students are employed through STEP. STEP provides up to \$500,000 in one-time funds to bolster student wages, stipends and assistantships. The investment in STEP, combined with the \$4.8 million regularly allocated to student employment brings the total investment in student employment to \$5.3 million. The typical student employee will earn \$3,200, which is the equivalent of one semester's tuition and books. STEP offers students quality educational experiences while providing faculty and staff members with needed assistance in areas such as media services, student-faculty research, supplemental instruction,

library assistance, instructional technology and academic computing support, and Web page development and maintenance.

“In addition to providing much-needed employment to the students, the STEP program has boosted the morale of the CON faculty and academic staff, giving us more time to focus on teaching and scholarship,” said associate professor of nursing Sharon Chappy. “Our STEP student has been a real asset, saving professors hours and hours of time.”

About 500 students applied for STEP jobs, including Jordan Clark-Mand, a journalism student who has an STEP position with the athletics department.

“This internship has helped me learn more about my biggest interest, sports promotion,” Clark-Mand said. “Journalism and public relations are competitive fields. Having successfully worked in a sports setting should help me contend for other sports-oriented positions.” Read a profile of Jordan [here](#).

Tricia Wood and Jaclyn Tucker, both master’s degree students in industrial organizational psychology, will be asking student employees to complete a survey this winter, which seeks to identify how engaged and satisfied students are with their on-campus employment. The survey will compare students employed in typical on-campus and work study jobs versus those in high-impact, STEP-funded positions. Wood and Tucker will also do personal interviews with employers.

“We’re very excited to take on this project, and hope that UW Oshkosh students can help us determine what is needed for quality student employment opportunities. It is nice to know that UW Oshkosh is so supportive of an enriching learning environment inside and outside of the classroom,” said Wood.

The survey will be distributed in January. Student employers are asked to encourage their student employees to participate. Participants will be entered into a drawing for a Kindle, an iPod Touch and a \$25 gift certificate to University Books & More.

- For more information about the STEP program, visit www.uwosh.edu/today/?p=2169.