

On-the-job training for FHSU student workers

Bureau of Labor Statistics data indicates students who hold down a job during college get higher grades than those who are not employed at least part time. Research conducted by SightLine also found that students working on campus were significantly more likely to remain in good academic standing and to stay enrolled. In fact, student employment is frequently one of the top five most important factors in predicting student success.

These are just some of the reasons why Fort Hays State University continues to invest in student employment. We also know that meaningful learning and engagement opportunities can help build career readiness, provide a “home-away-from-home” experience by creating a sense of belonging, and they can help with time management as working on campus offers an incredibly convenient work environment.

When I was a student, I worked at the campus grill (great way to meet people), provided administrative support for the theatre director (loved learning how to run a soundboard, lighting and especially running the spotlight) and got to put my basic research skills to action when the director of the cafeteria hired me to walk around the dining hall and survey students on their food service likes and dislikes.

A couple of weeks ago, I wrote about student Hannah Dechant’s college experience as a freshman. In addition to loving her Learning Community experience, Hannah, an elementary education major from Goodland, also mentioned her on-campus job. “I work at the Fort Hays State University farm, and I love every second I am there. I have shown sheep for 13 years, so I have been around livestock for most of my life, but I am constantly learning more and more everyday while I am at work.” One of Hannah’s work experiences included helping insert and remove CIDRS (progesterone releasing implants) to synchronize the reproductive cycle for breeding does.

Honestly, I hadn’t thought about students having jobs on the university farm. So that got me curious about what other student employment opportunities exist.

Our agriculture student employees are also responsible for checking pregnant cows, using ultrasound to check pregnancy of sows and working on a feed experiment with nursery pigs. They also assist sows during the labor process, including learning how to pull pigs – definitely not the same thing as pulled pork.

Students are driving grain trucks, hauling milo to the elevator. Several student employees are learning how to halter break and gentle down calves while others have been washing, drying and working hair on the sale heifers. Honestly, I don’t even know what some of this means – but it sounds more exciting than my job at the campus grill.

We have numerous opportunities for students to engage in student academic support jobs, providing peer-to-peer assistance such as tutoring, assisting with writing, or even helping with grading, preparing class materials and monitoring labs.

Belle Finney, a junior chemistry major from Beloit, is an online tutor for general and organic chemistry, lab prep staffer and front-desk employee. Bryant Karlin, a senior biology major from

Victoria, is a learning aide in the Human Cadaver Lab. He helps students with dissections and finding or identifying structures. He also maintains the lab space.

Student Makerspace assistants are printing skulls, trilobites and other artifacts for use by the Sternberg Museum of Natural History. Seth Colson, a Hoisington junior majoring In Applied Technology Studies, has been programming a NAO robot (humanoid) to remind people to wear masks on campus.

The Office of Global Partnerships (OGP) engages its student workers in unique experiences. Graduate student Xiao Sun (Lucia), a professional studies major from Xinzheng, China, helps translate curriculum and vital business documents from our Chinese partner schools. She also serves as an interpreter for administrators during face-to-face and Zoom meetings. Jadyn Snyder, a senior finance major from Lyons, assisted with the behind-the-scenes technical and marketing efforts for seven virtual summer camps for prospective students from China, Cameroon, Turkey and the Bahamas. She also assists with financial duties for the OGP.

Another area of student employment includes undergraduate research. I love the fact that, unlike many universities, our students get to participate in undergraduate research as early as their freshman year. These roles involve data analysis, literature reviews, practicing critical thinking and the scientific process as they evaluate results. Often, students present their research during poster sessions or at academic conferences.

Three students are working on a Laser Biophysics project in the FHSU Physics Department, the Air Force Research Lab and with a defense contractor. Their duties include research on laser effects on human tissue. Two other students are working in our Bat Molecular Biology Lab doing DNA analysis via Guano (bat droppings). I have been assured there is no direct handling of bats this year due to what is yet unknown about COVID transmissibility.

Cody Jiles, a junior physics major from Abilene, works with Dr. Gavin Buffington and lead-scientists at Virginia Tech to keep the SuperDARN radar (the field of antennas on the hill near the FHSU wind turbines) functioning at optimal levels. The knowledge gained from this research provides insight into space weather hazards, including radiation exposure for high-altitude travelers and disruption to GPS and electrical power grids.

An interesting job for student employees in the Department of Art and Design is helping Professor Toby Flores prepare the iron for iron pours and castings. According to Dean Paul Faber, this can require a couple of weeks of “stirring the pot” about once an hour to melt the scrap iron.

Campus programs, including Times Talks, Constitution Day, Voter Registration Day, Red Hand Day (protesting the impressing of children into military service) and Tiger Talkback are all managed by student employees together with volunteers.

That barely scratches the opportunity surface. We have student ambassadors, campus tour guides, Tiger Tots teacher assistants, Intramurals officials and coordinators, wellness center staff, students working in the Sternberg Museum Discovery Room, student athletic trainers, technology support staff and Tiger Media network producers and on-air talent. The list seems endless.

Fort Hays State believes deeply in investing in our students. Student employment maximizes university budgets and clearly produces a significant return on investment. Bottom line – on-

campus student employment is a good business, delivering phenomenal value through unique and meaningful high-impact educational experiences.

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