Working college students’ profile
Case Study: Faculty of Engineering Sibiu, Romania

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ABSTRACT

Faculty of Engineering in Sibiu is facing an increasing demand from industrial companies to employ students not only by the time of graduation but even during university studies. The scope of the study was to provide an insight on working students’ profile and the problems they are confronting with. Forty working students from the third year of Faculty of Engineering Sibiu were interviewed with regard of the research topic. Results of the study reflect the fact that a majority of working students face difficulties in school, having low grades or failed exams. The exam session seems to be a hard period for working students, and many of them find difficulties in attending all lectures or finding time to learn. Having a job while studying impacts personal activities, as well. Stress symptoms like: loss of appetite or overeating, difficulties in focusing, difficulties in taking decisions or feelings of restless are mentioned by the majority of working students. The results of the study are useful for the management of the faculty to come up with some measures to increase working students’ lectures attendance. Student support programs for reducing the stress among the group of working students must be developed as well.

Keywords: working students, student’s job, college, management.

INTRODUCTION

A high proportion of working students are simultaneously employed full-time and enrolled in college full-time. Working students face many challenges: they must balance work, school, extracurricular activities and personal life. In addition to offering financial independence and satisfaction, a job provides both training and experience and helps students develop time-management and confidence skills. Even if the students work in an unrelated field, the experience they gain can help them develop highly desirable professional skills. On the other hand, students who work often experience decreased academic performances and sometimes health problems, which can lead to dropping out school entirely. Working long hours also affects personal life, limiting the number of friends’ connections and leisure activities. The optimal strategy for students is to combine study with professional part-time employment. In this case, work becomes an additional source of knowledge and skills, as well as a motivation to learn (Yanbarisova, 2015).
SCOPE OF WORK

The scope of the study was to provide an insight on working students’ profile from the Faculty of Engineering Sibiu, Romania, and the problems they are confronting with, in order for the management of the faculty to come up with some measures to increase students’ lectures attendance. Faculty of Engineering in Sibiu is facing an increasing demand from industrial companies to employ students not only by the time of graduation but even during university studies. The students are either being offered a job or they themselves are taking a job in order to get the necessary “working experience” further needed in the recruitment process in an industrial company. As a consequence, the lectures’ attendance is decreasing.

The researchers were particularly looking for answers to the following questions:
- What are the main features of students’ jobs?
- What is the impact a job has on students’ school life and their health?

The methodology of the study is simple and can be easily replicated by any higher institute facing a high percentage of working students. The results of the study are useful for the faculty management in adjusting the educational offer and coming up with extra educational services.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Forty working students from the third year of Faculty of Engineering Sibiu\(^1\) were interviewed with regard of the research topic. The interviewed students were randomly selected, five students from each of the eight faculty specializations. The decision to select students from the third year of studies came from the fact that the third year was, by the time of the study, the year with the highest proportion of employed students (conclusion based on observations of students’ lecture attendance and discussions with the professors, although the proportion of employed students in the second and first year of studies has been increasing over the last years).

The data were collected by the means of self-administrated structured questionnaire, in March 2016 - at the beginning of the spring term and after students’ winter exam session.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Job characteristics of working students

55% of interviewed students are having a part time job and 45% of them work on a full time job. The reasons the students stated they had decided to take a job were financial independency (52.5%), getting a professional experience (40.0%) or taking advantage of an opportunity (7.5%). A percentage of 42.5% of the interviewed students had a job in a field related with the specialization they were attending in the university.

Besides the regular salary, other financial resources the students have consist of scholarship (17.5%), parents’ financial support (15.0%), other non-regular sources of income like daily jobs, remittances etc. (15.0%). The average monthly disposal income was 1167 lei (about 250 Euro). When asked about working hours, 67.5% said they can afford a flexible working schedule while 32.5% said they have to adjust their school according to a fixed working schedule.

Impact of having a job on students’ school life

\(^1\) Faculty of Engineering Sibiu is offering four years program of bachelor studies (8 semesters), followed by 2 years master programs.
Academic performance of working students was measured by two indicators: the average exams grade of the last session\textsuperscript{2} - February 2016 (Figure 1) and current number of exams still to pass (Figure 2)\textsuperscript{3}. The two metrics have been stated by the respondents and crosschecked by the research team with official faculty records.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig1.png}
\caption{Average session grade of working students}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig2.png}
\caption{Current number of exams failed by working students}
\end{figure}

It can be seen from the Figure 1 and Figure 2 that quite a high proportion of working students face difficulties in school: 42.5\% of them have lower grades (below 7.00) and 35\% of them still have more than 4 exams to pass. At the same time, part of the working students manage to combine the tasks they have at work and school quite well: 32.5\% of them have good marks (above 8.00) and 37.5\% of them have passed all their exams.

It is probably the inner motivation that plays an important role in fulfilling both school and job requirements. 57.5\% out of working students mentioned they would not give up university studies.

\textsuperscript{2} Faculty of Engineering Sibiu is organizing two ordinary sessions of exams each year: in February (end the fall semester) and in June (end the spring semester). The students are required to accumulate a certain number of credits by the end of each academic year (each exam being assigned a fixed number of credits). Within the session month, the students can undertake exams in each of the subjects taught during the current semester and in subjects not passed in the previous semesters (years) of study.

\textsuperscript{3} According to the Romanian grading system, 10 is the maximum grade and 5 is the minimum necessary in order to pass an exam.
by any means, while only 2.0% of them are very determined to continue working no matter what happens.

While trying to balance work and school, the students face difficulties in passing through exam period, 80% of students admitted that exam session is a very hard time for them (Figure 3). Other challenges come from finding a way to attend the compulsory lectures (75%) and finding time to learn (70%). 65% of the respondents said that it was difficult for them to ask for permission from the work to leave in order to attend a lecture and the same percentage said that they had the impression the professors did not really understood students’ need to work. A high percentage of students, 62.5%, mentioned the fact that quite often they did not manage to attend the classes and 52.5% said that because of very busy schedule at work they sometimes felt that they had the impression they were outdate with the lectures content.

**Impact of having a job on students’ health**

The main things regarding private life the students experienced after getting a job were a decrease in the number of friends (32.5% of the respondents) and less time for personal activities (92.5%). 72.5% of students said that they slept less since they got the job and 70% admitted that quite often they felt tired.

The students have been asked to mention which of the following stress symptoms they experienced over the last three months: tendency to quarrel for any reason, difficulties in decision-making, decisions taken in a hurry, difficulties in focusing, state of continual concern, increased alcohol or cigarette consumption, insomnia, continue working at home, loss of appetite or overeating, restlessness and worries (Figure 4). Stress symptoms like: loss of appetite or overeating, difficulties in focusing, difficulties in taking decisions or feelings of restless and worries are mentioned by more than 50% of working students.

![Figure 3: Difficulties in school life faced by working students](image-url)
### CONCLUSIONS

With the help of family and friends, many working students are able to keep their stress levels relatively under control. Identifying students' interests and goals is an important part of helping them successfully pass through college. Student organizations are a good way to network and find opportunities on and off campus. College career centers can connect students with employers, internships and volunteer work in their fields. Many colleges also offer career development courses, seminars and networking days. And counselors can help with everything from honing in on a specific industry to matching students' interests to sprucing up their résumés. Online networking can be helpful, too. At the same time, the management of the faculty and the professors themselves must take into consideration that the problems working students are confronting with and the fact that having a job simultaneously with obligativity to attend lectures is a factor that affects students' performances and behavior. Student support programs for reducing the stress among the group of working students as well as must be developed.

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