The National Student Employment Association (NSEA) is an organization of professionals working in support of college and university employment programs. NSEA supports and promotes student employment through research, publications, professional development opportunities, and the open exchange of information. NSEA is a key resource for current information on federal student employment regulations, and for expert advice on the Federal Work-Study Program. Through annual conferences and workshops, members are offered training opportunities and a nationwide network of experienced student employment colleagues. Similarly, the organization offers workplace employers access to student employment professionals, in the United States and abroad, who can help facilitate their workforce needs with well-trained, enthusiastic student employees.
From the Editor

Student Employment Professionals,

First, I would like to thank all of the authors who took time out of their schedule to contribute to the 2017 NSEA Journal of Student Employment. This publication would not be possible without your hard work and dedication as well as your willingness to share best practices and research across the NSEA organization. It is professionals like you who are making the argument for student employment’s growth and enhancement. Also a special thank you to those who peer-reviewed each submission; the quality of this journal depends on those who take the time to check facts, review flow and general understanding of the pieces submitted for publication.

The quality of the pieces are magnificent and will provide excellent use at all institutions who are connected with NSEA. As we move into a new strategic plan for 2018 it is my hope that we will continue to enhance publications in order to engage as many institutions as possible. There are many ways we are all contributing to better student employment and I believe they all deserve to be shared in a magnificent way. The 2017 edition is the last sponsored edition by the IUPUI Office of Student Employment. I encourage any institution with an interest in spearheading the next term of publications to connect with myself or Valerie Knopp, vjknopp@stcloudstate.edu.

Readers, I now invite each of you to take some time to review each publication and evaluate what can be taken away to impact your student employment programs. Thank you for your continued support of the NSEA Journal of Student Employment and we are looking forward to continuing to enhance this publication for future professionals to look to as a resource in implementing Student Employment on their campuses.

Thank you,

Jenna Corcoran
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The Student Employee and Employer Experience (SEEE): A Career Preparation Story

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Abstract

Researchers explored the student employee and employer experiences at the University of New Mexico (UNM) in relation to connection to academic progress, future career pathways, credentialing of skills learned, and investment of the university for its student employees and their employers. Over 300 student employees and over 150 of their employers participated in online surveys, followed by a focus group of participants from each group. Researchers reported that this study indicates that the UNM student employee experience is a positive one. Both employees and their employers have very similar understandings of the benefits of their campus jobs, and are quite positive about the experiences the students are having through their employment. Both populations agree that student employees are given opportunities to succeed at work and to implement many of the skills necessary for success in the world of work. The employers take great pride and responsibility in guiding and mentoring their student employees, investing in their skills to be successful employees in the careers of their choice. There is room for improvement in this system of over 5,000 student employees, but through this study we have gained insights into this program, and both groups of participants shared many ideas to continue to improve the work experiences for UNM student employees in the future.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study, the Student Employee and Employer Experience at the University of New Mexico, was to gather qualitative and quantitative data regarding the student employee experience at UNM. Through online surveys and focus groups, researchers were interested in understanding this experience from the viewpoints of both the students and their campus employers.

Research Questions

The study team investigated three research questions during this study:

- **a)** What is the relationship between the college students’ perceptions of their employment experiences and the college employers’ self-assessment of their own investment in student employees?
- **b)** What is the relationship between supervisors’ and students’ perceptions of the degree to which students are or will be prepared in the foundational competencies that are needed in the workplace and professional careers?
- **c)** What is the perceived influence of transfer of workplace skills to real-world experiences?
Methodology

Researchers emailed online surveys to all UNM student employees and student employee supervisors. Consent to participate was inherent in participants’ choosing to continue from the invitation email to the online survey via a website link. At the end of the survey, participants were offered the opportunity to participate in focus groups. Participants clicked on a link in the survey if they chose to participate in a focus group, and were directed to enter their names and email addresses to be informed of the time and location of their focus group.

For data analysis, researchers calculated descriptive statistics for quantitative responses, and coded themes for qualitative data responses (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Participants

Online Survey Participants

Student employees. UNM and its branch campuses employ over 5,000 students, both undergraduates and graduates. Of these, 2,839 main campus student employees received an email invitation to participate in an online survey focusing on his or her experience as a UNM student employee. The study team received online survey responses from 374 student employees. Of those 374 responses, 18 indicated a willingness to participate in the student employee focus group. Invitations were sent to all those willing to participate, and six (6) students attended the 90-minute focus group.

Table 1: Number of email requests sent/received, response rate, and level of confidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Number of requests sent</th>
<th>Number of responses received</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
<th>Level of Confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Employee</td>
<td>2839</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>13.17%</td>
<td>95% +/-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Employer</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>28.63%</td>
<td>90% +/-5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student employee demographics. Of the 374 students who participated in the online survey, two-thirds (67.56%/252) were female and two-thirds (68.17%/258) aged 18-24. Following this age range, 13% were ages 25-29, 10.9% were from 30-39, and 6.7% were 40 or older.

In terms of student classification, 40.48% (151) of all student employee participants were seniors. The next largest category were juniors (28.69%), then sophomores (15.82%), graduate students (10.99%), and finally freshmen (4.02%).

The ethnicity of the student employee participants did not accurately reflect the ethnic makeup of our majority-minority campus, however, all ethnicities were represented save Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. The ethnicity of student participants is outlined in Table 2.

Student employment data. Work environment. The majority of student respondents work in office settings (36.61%/220); 20.63% (124) work in academic settings, followed closely by those working in student services (19.8%/119). Ten percent (61) work in the community as part of their student employment.

Hours worked per week. Over half of student employees (53.74%/201) work between 11-20 hours per week, followed by 32.89% (123) who work 21 hours or more. Only 13.37% (50) work 10 or fewer hours per week.

College Work Study. Over half of student employees (59.63%/223) are also employed in the College Work Study program, leaving 40.37% (151) who do not receive Work Study funding for their employment.

Employers of student employees. There are 744 faculty and staff on campus who supervise student employees. Each employer received an email invitation to participate in the online survey focusing on his or her work as a student employee
supervisor. A total of 213 employers completed the online survey. Of those 213 employers, 12 indicated a willingness to participate in the employer focus group, with five (5) employers participating in the 90-minute focus group.

Employer descriptive data. Current job titles. The majority of employer respondents are middle managers (39.44%/84), followed by employers indicating, other (26.76%/57). Those other job titles named included administrative assistant, coordinator, facility supervisor, lab manager, and even student employee. Department administrators made up 17.84% (38) of respondents, followed by faculty (13.15%/28).

Number of student employees. The majority of supervisors have one (1) to three (3) student employees (59.15%/126), with 22.07% (47) supervising more than seven (7) student employees. Nearly 20% (19.8%/40) supervise four (4) to seven (7) student employees.

Focus Group Participants
Researchers conducted two 90-minute focus groups as a follow-up to the online surveys: one with student employees and one with employers.

Student employee focus group participants. Six (6) student employees participated in the focus group; five (5) of whom were female. Four (4) students were undergraduates and two (2) were graduate students; the undergraduates were juniors or seniors. They worked in various areas around campus, including working in admissions, in instructional technology, as research assistants, as office assistants, and in the library. For all participants, this was not their first work experience.

Student Employer Focus Group Participants.
Five (5) staff members who employ student employees participated in the focus group; three (3) of whom were male. They employed a broad range of students, numbering from 2 to 75, of whom the majority were undergraduates. Their roles included managers at the recreation center and the library, student services officers working with Student Affairs and tutoring, and a research laboratory manager.

Statement of Findings

Student Employee-Employer Perceptions of Workplace Opportunities
Student employees and student employers were asked 10 Likert-Scale rating questions regarding the extent to which their student employment experiences (as a student or as an employer) provided the student employee with specific workplace opportunities that are connected to success in the world of work, as identified by the U. S. Department of Labor, Employment, and Training Administration. These 10 questions required a 1-5 Likert Scale response (5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neither Agree or Disagree, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree).

Table 3 lists those specific workplace opportunities, along with the responses indicating they Agree or Strongly Agree from both the student employees and the student employers.

In all but one category, both student employees and their employers agreed that UNM student employees are provided opportunities to develop...
workplace skills as part of their student employment. In addition, the perceptions of both groups are very closely aligned regarding these opportunities. Even in the single category only receiving two-thirds of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing (the use of talents for job advancement), both employees and employers agree in their rating of this particular opportunity. In considering this one area receiving lower marks, researchers considered the qualitative comments from the surveys that indicated that in student campus employment there are very few opportunities for advancement.

In general, students are afforded many opportunities to be successful in their campus jobs, and their employers agree that students are provided these opportunities.

**Student Focus Group Responses Regarding Workplace Experiences.** In the focus group, students reviewed the CareerOneStop *Building Blocks* (2016) and were asked which of the foundational skills were the most important to them and why. These foundational skills connect directly to the questions on the survey regarding workplace opportunities. Students named dependability, reliability, willingness to learn interpersonal skills, professionalism, integrity, teamwork, and critical thinking.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Extent to Which Participants were Provided with the Following Opportunities</th>
<th>% of Student EMPLOYEES who Agree or Strongly Agree</th>
<th>% of Student EMPLOYERS who Agree or Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Experience the day-to-day realities of the professional workplace</td>
<td>86.63</td>
<td>94.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Use skills to generate solutions to problems</td>
<td>90.37</td>
<td>92.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Work cooperatively with others to complete assignments</td>
<td>86.90</td>
<td>92.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Use interpersonal skills to work effectively with others</td>
<td>93.05</td>
<td>98.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Prioritize work to manage time effectively on assigned tasks</td>
<td>90.11</td>
<td>88.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Demonstrate the work ethic of showing up ready to work</td>
<td>90.38</td>
<td>94.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Use technology for work-related tasks</td>
<td>90.04</td>
<td>94.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Adapt to changing requirements</td>
<td>90.11</td>
<td>91.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Use talents for job advancement</td>
<td>66.58</td>
<td>68.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Take initiative to follow through and get the job done</td>
<td>91.44</td>
<td>93.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*“Willingness to learn with my jobs because with my jobs, there are a lot of opportunities to learn from mistakes you make, and I think that ability is important because otherwise you are not going to grow, and be open to new ideas. I love getting ideas from other people and integrating them into what I do to make things easier.”* Tianna
responded that it was her “willingness to learn with my jobs because with my jobs, there are a lot of opportunities to learn from mistakes you make, and I think that ability is important because otherwise you are not going to grow, and be open to new ideas. I love getting ideas from other people and integrating them into what I do to make things easier.”

Regarding interpersonal skills, Ophelia stated that, “I spend a lot of time working with people, especially students, and you need to know how to talk to them, how to be quick and helpful, and to be professional.”

Esther added that one skill she would like to continue to hone is initiative. “I am learning to make that transition from a student to a professional, and I think taking more leadership is a sign that I am doing that.”

**Certificate Indicating Workplace Skills**

**Student survey responses.** When student employees were asked if they would find it valuable to receive a certificate as evidence of attainment of workplace skills needed to succeed on this job, the majority of student employees answered “yes” (59.89%/224), with 40.11% (150) responding “no.” When asked to comment on their responses, those who indicated that a workplace skills certificate would be beneficial stated that they would use it as:

a) Information on a resume,

b) Evidence or validation of their skills, or
c) To persuade employers to hire them.

One student commented that he would find a workplace certificate “encouraging and motivating” to continue to do good work; another indicated it would encourage “a higher work ethic.”

Those who did not see the value in a workplace certificate indicated that they could simply note their employment on their resumes, or would ask for letters of recommendation from their employers as evidence of their skills. Several commented that, “Employers don’t care about certificates.”

**Student focus group responses.** Students in the focus group were positive about the idea of a workplace certificate. Estrela explained, “An undergraduate degree is not enough to get a job. I could put this on my CV [curriculum vitae] to say what I have done. It could give students an advantage that you took the competency seriously.” Tiara echoed that, “being a tour guide is not taken seriously, but showing something [a certificate] that I have the skills is important.”

**Student employer survey responses.** Similarly, over 60% (60.09%/128) of employers found value in issuing certificates to students as evidence of attainment of workplace skills needed to succeed on the job, while close to 40% (39.01%/85) did not see this as valuable. Supervisor comments mirrored those of the
students regarding the importance of certificates for resume-building, along with indicating specific skills gained while students were employed at UNM. Comments from supervisors included, “I believe that recognizing students for their success can not only improve their efficiency and productivity, but also give them the opportunity to grow as professionals;” and “I think it would be great if there was a way to document either through certificates or other means, the skills students have gained so they can have something tangible to bring with them into the workplace.” Indeed several employers said they already do award certificates to their student employees on their own.

Those disagreeing with the need for a skills certificate indicated similar reasons to the students, such as letters of recommendation serve the same purpose.

**Student employer focus group responses.**

Employers, like the students, had mixed responses to the usefulness of certificates or badges to denote skill attainment. Edward commented that they probably wouldn’t care about a certificate, “But they would want more money.” Meredith added that she did not really need to award certificates because “these types of things I would put in a performance review or a reference letter.” Jose indicated that his department is already adding actual buttons for students to physically attach to their identification lanyards indicating the skills they had attained that could be useful for their clients.

Jordan suggested that if we could see that the certificate was valued “outside UNM” then he could see a purpose in this type of system.

**Additional Findings from the Student Employee Survey**

**Employment as a factor in engagement in academic programs.** When student employees were asked, “Has your UNM student employment experience helped keep you engaged in your academic program?” three-fourths (75.61%/284) responded positively. Students commented that their employment assisted them in:

- Staying connected to specific content areas;
- Allowing them to have time to study and complete homework assignments;
- Using specific skills on the job including writing, research, communication, and technology;
- Expanding their contacts and networking;
- Allowing them to have flexible hours; and
- Not having to travel to get to their workplace.

Other individuals commented on the role their supervisors played in helping them focus on their academics with such comments as, “being a student first,” “helping me manage my time,” “having less worry about finances,” and “having to maintain my GPA to continue working.”

Those whose work experiences did not help them stay connected academically (24.06%/90) expressed that their current jobs were “not connected to their academic programs” or that they had “not chosen an academic major yet.” Other students indicated that their jobs “actually decreased available study time,” increased their stress levels, and that they were not allowed to take time off of work.

**Use of experiences in future careers.**

Student employees were asked to what extent they believe they would be able to use their experiences encountered as UNM employees in their future careers. Over 40% said they would be able to use these experiences “a great deal,” followed by 33.42% who could use their experiences “considerably.” Over 15% indicated they could “moderately” use these experiences, followed by 10% who said they could use their experiences “slightly” (9.09%) or “not at all” (1.60%).

**Additional Findings from the Student Employer Survey and Focus Group**

**Satisfaction with UNM’s investment in preparing student employees for future success.**

Survey results indicated nearly 40% (39.91/85) of supervisors were “very satisfied” with UNM’s investment in preparing student employees for their future career success, followed by 38.03% (81) who were “moderately satisfied;” 9.86% (21)
were “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.” Less than 6% (5.16%/11) indicated they were “moderately dissatisfied,” with only 1.88% (4) indicating they were “very dissatisfied.” Less than 6% (5.16%/11) said they had “no basis to judge” their satisfaction with UNM’s investment in its student employees.

In the focus group, all participants were fairly satisfied with UNM’s investment, as indicated by Edward that UNM is “headed in the right direction.” All focus group participants had specific suggestions for improving UNM’s investment in its student employees.

**Suggestions for improvement in the student employment experience.** Interestingly, in the survey, in connection to the question above, 176 employers (82.62%) answered the open-ended question, “What suggestions do you have to improve the student employment experience?” with a comment or suggestion for improvement. Many of these comments indicated the need for a student employee orientation and/or more training for student employees. Several commented on the need for “better processes” such as faster hiring turnaround times, better ways to report hours, faster background checks, and improved guides for payroll processes. Other respondents wanted the ability to “give flexible hours,” better communication, being able to give raises, and the ability to give sick time and benefits. Several commented that the “program is great,” and still others suggested even more connection with students’ future career paths.

In the focus groups, employers echoed these suggestions and added others regarding the need for more policies, supervisory issues, flexible scheduling, safety training, and more collaboration across the University, especially in the area of training of student employees. Rolinda suggested that there “should be a basic customer service training—there is too much independent training going on.” However others cautioned that even low satisfaction has a tradeoff. Meredith stated, “The tradeoff is total freedom. I now have the luxury of tailoring [my student training] to what I need.” Jose concurred, “I don’t want to give up my autonomy with my training and my interview questions.”

Another issue that created intense conversation was that of supervision and the necessity, or lack thereof, for students to be supervised at all times. Meredith connected to the previous conversation with, “If we are going to talk about real world, then we have to trust them to be unsupervised—some of my students are close in age to me.” Rolinda concurred, “We have students working off-campus….they have to be treated the same as any other staff.”

The group agreed that the Office of Student Employment was understaffed and they needed more employees to support their work. One member indicated, “I think this office is mainly made up of student employees too.” Meredith summarized the conversation with, “I could be in non-compliance without knowing what compliance is.”

**Personal investment in workplace skill development.** As a follow-up survey question, employers were asked to rate their “own investment in developing the workplace skills of your student employees” on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being “very satisfied” and 1 being “very dissatisfied.” Over 95% (96.25%/205) indicated they were either “very satisfied” or “moderately satisfied” with their own personal efforts in this area.

In the focus group, employers were asked what percentage of their time at work was spent working with their student employees. Responses ranged from 10%, “because I have someone else who works with our students more directly,” to 100%. Edward remarked, “Here’s one [a student] texting me now!”

**Student employees and workplace goals.** Over 90% (90.52%/191) of employers who responded to the survey believed that their UNM student employees met the goals they set for them “a great deal” or “considerably.” Only 9.48% (20) said their students either “moderately” or
“slightly” met their goals. No employer indicated that their UNM student did not meet their goals.

In the focus group, employers talked about supporting their students wherever they were in terms of their skill development. Jordan shared, “If somebody demonstrated they wanted to learn new things, we help them do that. We want them to be well-prepared for the workplace.” However others talked about the lack of student goals because there are not typically areas for advancement within student employee positions. Edward questioned, “What do our students want or need?” Jose responded, “We never ask them enough about whether the services we deliver around the university are valuable to students.”

**Preparedness for the success in the workplace.** Nearly one-fourth of employers who responded to the survey (23.70%/50) indicated that their student employees were “extremely prepared” for success in the workplace, with 53.08% (112) indicating their students were “very prepared.” Only 20.85% (44) said their students were only “moderately prepared,” with less than 3% indicated their students were only “slightly prepared” or “not at all” prepared for success in the workplace.

In summarizing the value of student employees to the University, Meredith concluded with this comment: “We don’t talk about how critical the student employees are. If they all went on strike tomorrow, the University would crash!”

**Research Questions Revisited**

**Perceptions and Assessments of Student Employment**

Researchers asked, “What is the relationship between the college students’ perceptions of their employment experiences and the college employers’ self-assessment of their own investment in student employees?” Answers from both the student employee and employer perspectives were quite positive.

From the student employee perspective, their student employment made them better students. They cited connections with their academic programs through their work, encouragement from employers, time for studies, flexible work schedules, and professional contacts within the University. Student employees also believe that their campus work experiences are preparing them for future employment, enabling them to hone skills, gain experience, and find support from their employers in their future plans.

The employers believe they are making a positive difference in students’ lives. They are satisfied with the investment they are personally making to their student employees, and more modestly satisfied with the investment of UNM in student employees. Employers did cite the need for improvement in UNM policies and student training in various areas.

**Preparedness in Foundational Competencies**

Researchers asked a second question: “What is the relationship between supervisors’ and students’ perceptions of the degree to which students are or will be prepared in the foundational competencies that are needed in the workplace and professional careers?” Perceptions of student employees and their employers were surprisingly similar in each of the nine foundational competencies as identified by the U.S. Department of Labor. Overall both groups of participants rated their preparedness as high in all areas save one, opportunities for promotion, with use of interpersonal skills being the area in which they felt best prepared.

**Transferability of Campus Employment to Future Employment**

Finally, researchers asked, “What is the perceived influence of transfer of workplace skills to real-world experiences?” Again, both groups of participants believed that their skills would serve them well as they matriculate from the campus work environment to other work environments. Students strongly believed the skills they were
learning in their campus employment would transfer to future employment, and their employers agreed that the student employees they supervised would be well-prepared for their future career choices. Both groups also agreed that formal credentialing of workplace skills in some form would be helpful in attaining future employment. The results of this study indicate that overall, the UNM student employee experience is a positive one. Both employees and their employers have very similar understandings of the benefits of their campus jobs, and are quite positive about the experiences the students are having through their employment.

Both populations agree that student employees are given opportunities to succeed at work and to implement many of the skills necessary for success in the world of work. The employers take great pride and responsibility in guiding and mentoring their student employees, investing in their skills to be successful employees in the careers of their choice.

There is room for improvement in this system of over 5,000 student employees, but through this study we have gained insights into this program, and both groups of participants shared many ideas to continue to improve the work experiences for UNM students in the future.

In summarizing the value of student employees to the University, Meredith concluded with this comment: “We don’t talk about how critical the student employees are. If they all went on strike tomorrow, the University would crash!”

**References**


Engaging Foster Care and Homeless Students through Student Employment

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Abstract

Homeless and foster students face many obstacles in obtaining a college education. The Department of Education assists in relieving the financial difficulties by awarding the Pell Grant to students with high financial need. The Pell Grant does not cover all living expenses and most students do require other sources of income such as employment. Homeless students face difficulties in gaining employment because of their lack of resources such as reliable transportation and an address. Foster students have trouble transitioning to college in comparison to their counterparts due to being in state custody. Both groups generally have limited employment experience, which further decreases the chances of gaining employment. Student employment can address these difficulties. This article discusses engaging homeless and foster care students through student employment. Kennesaw State University (KSU) CARE program using Federal Work Study funding provides a model in engaging these students through employment to address their current financial situation and give them additional experience to succeed after college. This article will look at the needs related to gaining employment for homeless and foster care students, and the model KSU uses to assist these students.

Engaging Foster Care and Homeless Students through Employment

College students are ever increasingly burdened with the cost of attending an institution of higher learning. Students in foster care and at-risk homeless (FCH) students have additional financial difficulties while attending college. The most important issues are food insecurity, homelessness and lacking a support system. The Department of Education (DOE) recognizes the financial difficulties of these students and requires that these students be regarded as independent students per the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) (Federal Student Aid 2016). Students only have to report their and (if applicable) their spouse’s information. Students are more likely to have a zero estimated family contribution (EFC) that makes them eligible for the Pell Grant.

Pell Grant usually does not cover 100% of tuition and fees. Students also need to pay for housing, food, books and other related expenses.

Students can receive scholarships, grants or take out loans. This helps with covering the costs for students attending school but it may not be enough. In addition, foster care and at-risk homeless students face additional challenges beyond simply paying for college.

This paper is a case study on how Kennesaw State University (KSU) addresses the needs of FCH students and engages students through employment. The paper will first review related literature, discuss definitions and review the needs of the students through the lens of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. The next part is KSU’s case study on engaging FCH students through multiple programs at the University followed by recommendations on implementing a program at other institutions. This paper argues that student employment assists FCH students in reaching Maslow’s third tier.
Love/Belonging, but only if the student’s basic needs are met first (Aanstoos 2016).

**Issues Facing Foster Care and Homeless Students**

Students formerly in foster care or homeless face unique challenges when pursuing a post-secondary degree. When foster students age out of the system, usually at age 18, they lose state benefits (Children’s Bureau 2013, p. 2). Foster care students already face multiple challenges in transitioning to be self-sufficient with the most difficult being financially independent (Ahmann 2017, p. 43; Edelstein & Lowenstein 2014a, p. 2). In addition, youth aging out of the foster system face other challenges such as employment due to possible lack of experience, support system and education due unstable living situations. (Edelstein & Lowenstein 2014a, p. 2; Geiger & Beltran 2017, p. 186).

Homeless students face a similar uphill battle and need help with acquiring the appropriate life, social, personal and workplace skills to be successful (Nelson, Gray, Maurice & Shaffer 2012, p. 71). Homeless students also have a lack of resources that are generally needed for employment such as transportation, food, an address and a stable place to sleep. The lack of resources compounds when pursuing a degree which requires the ability to pay for tuition, fees and books. This doesn’t include any other related expenses such as transportation, housing and food.

The Department of Education recognizes the special circumstances that these students are in and allow them for to be considered independent students on the FAFSA (Federal Student Aid 2016, AVG-25). Question 53 on the FAFSA asks applicants if they are an “orphan, foster child, or ward of the court” (Federal Student Aid 2016, AVG-25). Students that were considered a foster child at any time after the age of 13 is considered independent even if their status changed later (Federal Student Aid 2016, AVG-25).

Questions 56 to 58 ask if a student is considered an unaccompanied homeless youth or at risk of being homeless (Federal Student Aid 2016, AVG-28).

This is determined through supporting documents from a school district homeless liaison, the director (or designee) of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, or the director (or designee) of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program (Federal Student Aid 2016, AVG-28).

Designating FCH students as independent gives them a greater chance to have a zero (or close to it) EFC since they do not need to include any parent income on their FAFSA. A low EFC makes these students eligible for the Pell Grant that awards up to $5815 for the 16/17 aid year depending on the institutions cost of attendance (Federal Student Aid 2016, 3-44). Roughly a third of all undergraduates are considered low income and eligible for the Pell Grant (Chaplot, Cooper, Johnstone & Karandjeff 2015, p. 1).

The Pell Grant typically covers enough to pay for tuition and maybe fees. This leaves students with limited resources the option to earn scholarships which usually require recommendation letters. This is more difficult for students that may not have the social support system to write letters. The next option is accepting student loans which is not ideal for students with limited to no financial support and required to pay back the loans regardless of receiving a degree or not. Low and moderate income students have a higher cost to pay for college relative their income even after all grants and scholarships are factored in (Goldrick-Rab, Broton & Eisenberg 2015, p. 3). Students in lower income quartiles are less likely to finish their degree with the lowest quartile graduating at a rate around 26-29% (Chaplot et al., 2015, p. x; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, p. 3).

The issue for many FCH students is food and housing insecurity. Goldrick-Rab et al. (2015, p. 12) conducted a survey among 4000 students at 10 different community colleges and found that 52% face housing insecurity and 13% were homeless. Housing insecurity is defined as having trouble paying rent, utilities or being evicted (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, p. 12). In the same study, roughly 48% of students faced food insecurity which is defined as
not being able to purchase enough to eat, eating a balanced meal or completely forgoing meals altogether (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, p. 11).

Dubick, Mathews and Cady (2016, p. 7) expanded off Goldrick-Rab et al.’s (2015) study and found that 64% of the food insecure students were also housing insecure. Around 15% of food insecure were homeless (Dubick et al., 2016, p. 7). In many of these cases employment was not able to resolve these issues with 56% of food insecure having a job and 38% of food insecure student’s work more than 20 hours a week (Dubick et al., 2016, p. 8).

The general consensus among the literature is that students need access to basic resources such as food and housing to have a better chance of earning a post-secondary degree (Dubick et al., 2016, p. 33; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, p. 18; Barman-Adhikari & Rice 2014, p. 99; Unrau, Dawson, Hamilton & Bennett 2017, p. 65). FCH students also need access to housing in order to pursue their education (Dubick et al., 2016, p. 36; Barman-Adhikari & Rice 2014, p. 99; Unrau et al., 2017, p. 65). Barman-Adhikari & Rice (2014, p. 99) point out that homeless students in particular are less likely to pursue employment until basic needs are met. After the food and housing, the next step is some sort of mentorship or training program geared towards the individual (Barnow, Buck, O’Brien, Pecora, Ellis & Steiner 2015, p. 159; Unrau et al., 2016, p. 65; Scherr 2015, p. 67; Edelstein & Lowenstein 2014b, p. 1; Nelson et., 2012, 721).

The literature is essentially arguing that in order for FCH students to be successful in college and beyond, they need to meet their physiological needs and use some form of engagement to achieve the third tier of Belonging/Love in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Aanstoos 2016). The next section of the paper will discuss how Kennesaw State University assists FCH students in meeting their physiological and eventually their psychological needs.

Kennesaw State’s Employment Program

Kennesaw State University is an example of how foster care and homeless students can be engaged to keep the students involved on campus. Before discussing specifically how the student employment engages FCH students, it is necessary to discuss the KSU Campus Awareness, Resource & Empowerment (CARE) program (CARE Services 2017).

The CARE program offers support to students who have experienced homelessness, food insecurity and/or the foster care system (CARE Services 2017). The program works with these students in navigating campus resources. The CARE center also assists students by working with departments on campus such as the Office of Financial Aid, Registrar’s Office, Campus Housing, etc. (CARE Services 2017). Finally, the CARE program operates the food pantry, provides personal care items and assists in accessing temporary and/or permanent housing (CARE Services 2017).

Unrau et al., (2017, p. 68) found in their survey of perceived importance of college programs that former foster care students were more concerned with housing (ranked #2) and coaching to work through problems (ranked #7 and #8). Help finding a job ranked 13th out 18 categories in importance (Unrau et al., 2017, 68). This survey aligns with Maslow’s theory of Hierarchy of Needs in that the students cited housing and career coaching as more important than gaining employment (Aanstoos 2016). Barman-Adhikari & Rice (2014) further clarify that homeless students are more concerned with the basic needs over employment. The CARE center addresses the first two tiers by providing access to food, shelter and security.

Student employment then is considered part of the third tier of Maslow’s theory by creating on campus connections and affectively making the student part of a group. CARE and the Federal Work Study (FWS) program work together to help FCH students get to the third tier. This is done by employing students receiving CARE services that have trouble finding employment in FWS approved positions.
achieve the next tier, the FWS program works with the CARE program to place CARE recipients in jobs on campus. This allows students to connect to campus life by being directly engaged with a department.

The CARE center covers the basic physiological needs by providing bags of food that are available for all KSU students regardless of their level of food insecurity (CARE Services 2017). The CARE center offers temporary housing for at-risk homeless students (CARE Services 2017). The students are housed on campus for up to 14 days (Davis 2016; CARE Services 2017). The CARE center then sets up other housing arrangements for the student (Davis 2016; CARE Services 2017).

Once the basic physiological needs are met, FCH students need an active mentor or coaching to help guide them (Barnow et al., 2015, p. 159; Unrau et al., 2016, p. 65; Scherr 2015, p. 67; Edelstein & Lowenstein 2014b, p. 1; Nelson et., 2012, 721). The CARE center handles this portion as well by mentoring both foster care and at-risk homeless students. The services include navigating campus life, working with departments and finding employment opportunities (CARE Services 2017).

The next significant step is to create an engagement opportunity FCH students. This provides students in need of significant help work towards becoming more financially secure by earning wages, building up their resume by learning new skills and meeting the third tier in the Hierarchy of Needs by belonging to part of a group (Aanstoos 2016).

**The Employment Program**

The FWS program set aside $10,000 in funding towards temporary on-campus jobs for recipients of CARE services. During the mentorship phase, the CARE center identifies foster care and at-risk homeless students that are having trouble finding employment. The student is directed to apply for the temporary position. The purpose is to provide students that are receiving housing assistance a chance to build up their assets while they have no immediate expenses since CARE provides both food and temporary housing. The temporary status gives the students the training, skills and assets needed to be self-sustaining once the temporary benefits end.

The student is hired at minimum wage and awarded $1000 in Federal Work Study financial aid. The job is temporary and ends when one of the following events happen: The student earns their $1000 award, is employed for 60 days in the temporary role, or is employed in another on-campus employment opportunity. The purpose of the temporary status is to give students a set timeline on when the job will end and work towards gaining a more permanent job whether it is on or off campus.

Once the student completes HR’s onboarding process, the student begins in a broad training program created by the CARE center in coordination with KSU’s Career Planning and Development. The temporary position starts with an initial eight hour training program. The training consists of office etiquette, customer service, operating office equipment, resume writing and other job search skills. The training program is so students have a basic level of training especially if they never had a job before and to train them in how to put those skills on a resume.

After training, students are placed in the most appropriate department for their needs. The department is selected by the CARE Center based on the student’s needs. For example, if the student needs office experience, they are placed in a more business-like office. If the student needs more personal attention they are placed in a smaller more personal office. This CARE Center staff and the department staff will co-mentor the student in their academic, career and personal goals.

**Results**

The program at KSU is still very new having only been created in fall 2016. So far, the results have been positive with all the students gaining employment either through their sponsoring department, or in another position. Only a handful of students were employed through the program so there is not any significant data on the effects of the program. The general discussion with sponsoring
departments is positive as well with the supervisors providing positive reviews of the student they mentor. Further evaluation is needed over an extended period of time to better understand if and how the program benefits FCH students.

**Recommendations for Implementing a Similar Program**

The program is easy to begin, especially since almost every educational institution has some sort of student employment program whether it is using institutional and/or FWS funds. Institutions may or may not have a CARE type program that addresses food, housing and personal security. This type of program is essential to engaging students through employment, otherwise an academic career is significantly harder when students can’t meet their basic needs.

The first goal is to meet a student’s physiological needs by providing food. This can be done by setting up a food pantry that receives donations from the community (Dubick et al., 2016, p. 33; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, p. 18). The donations are then distributed to any student who is facing food insecurity. The CARE pantry provides food to any KSU student without questions. Students receiving CARE services are able to acquire food on a more frequent basis (CARE Services 2017).

The food pantry may not be an option for many education institutions because of limited institutional funds for the program, or the institution is in more rural area without a community that can adequately support a food pantry. Dubick et al., (2016, p. 33) offers other options such a Food Recovery program where unused food from dining halls is repurposed and distributed as ready-made meals. Another option is for students to donate pre-paid meals from the campus dining plans and used as food vouchers for food insecure students (Dubick et al., 2016, p. 34). A third option is to provide food-insecure students a free meal plan. A final suggestion is to employ a student with an on-campus dining facility so the student receives earnings and food.

The next essential step is to secure housing for at-risk homeless students. This is important to meet both the physiological and the safety needs of the Hierarchy of Needs (Aanstoos 2016). KSU’s CARE program receives a grant from the Beacon Foundation to provide temporary on-campus housing for homeless students, and then provide temporary housing with local apartments or hotels (CARE Services 2017). The on-campus apartment is specifically set aside for the CARE program (CARE Services 2017).

This may be even more difficult to provide for homeless students due to available housing on campus, available living facilities around campus and the overall financial cost to provide temporary housing for students. An option to assist homeless students is to find employment for them on or off campus with the institutions Residence Housing department, or with a private company. The student would receive wages and be provided a room to stay.

The first two options offer up employment as a way for students to address food insecurity and homelessness. This does not mean that the mentorship step should be skipped. Employment is the method of engagement to assist students in giving them a place to belong. Providing food and shelter does help students meet the basic needs, but the mentorship is key to helping students succeed and not just survive. A mentor program can be through a specific program that assists students in foster care and homeless, student counseling services, or even a career services program. The students need someone that is actively assisting the student get back on their feet, make sure they are meeting their basic needs and able to succeed both academically and post-graduation.
References


The mission of the Office of Student Employment is to support the Division of Undergraduate Education by empowering students to pursue and succeed in meaningful, academically relevant college work experiences that enhance both academic and professional growth.

The Office of Student Employment will achieve its mission through:

- Creating campus dialogue and understanding of synergy between academics and collegiate work experiences
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