The Impact of Part-Time Work on the Student Experience

by

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Abstract

A greater proportion of students in Canada are working part-time while attending university than ever before. Furthermore, the primary reason students give for attending university has slowly shifted from the pursuit of knowledge to the pursuit of a better career. When taken together, these factors suggest that part-time work, either pre- or post-graduation, is a part of the new reality of pursuing higher education. However, very little is known about how working part-time while studying impacts the overall student experience.

This study explores the experiences of sixteen business students who worked part-time in an effort to gain a better understanding of their experiences. The existing, primarily survey-based, literature was used as a starting point for this exploration and allowed the author to identify several key factors associated with student success, namely: academic performance, health, engagement with the on- and off-campus communities, and competency development. This study made use of in-depth interviews to deepen the understanding of the working student experience in ways that complement the existing scholarly research in this area.

The results of this study, presented in a comprehensive model, illuminate a number of immediate and longer-term impacts of part-time work on the student experience. Personal, academic, and workplace factors that were shown to impact the working student experience are highlighted as considerations for future working students to keep in mind when selecting an ideal part-time role. This study concludes with call to action for institutions of higher learning to better support working students, and a series of recommendations to consider in doing so.

Keywords: student employment; part-time work; students; employers; grade point average; academic performance; health; engagement; post-graduation employability; skills; competencies.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

Undergraduate students lead busy lives, balancing demanding academic schedules with social and extra-curricular activities. A 2015 Canadian survey of over eighteen thousand graduating students showed that the average undergraduate student spends approximately thirty-two hours per week on academics, both inside the classroom, attending lectures, and outside the classroom, studying (Canadian University Survey Consortium, 2015). The typical undergraduate student may also be involved in student clubs and government, social activities, recreational and sports activities, and part-time work. When all of these are combined, the most active students spend sixty to eighty hours a week on academic, work, and extra-curricular pursuits (Curtis, 2007; King & Bannon, 2002; Tannock & Flocks, 2003). These activities, both inside the classroom and out, play an important role in shaping students’ experiences during their time in university (Abel, 2002; Astin, 1993; Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Derous & Ryan, 2008; Kolb, 1984; Kuh, 2007c; Little, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Indeed, the time students spend at university is rich with developmental opportunities and multiple sources of learning, what Svanum and Bigatti (2006) refer to as a “tapestry of individual change” (p. 564). For the purposes of this study I have chosen to focus on just one of the sources of learning that contributes to this tapestry – namely, working part-time.

Student Employment: Background of the Study

The Canadian University Consortium (2015) reports that 59% of undergraduate students work in their final year; data from the United States suggests that 75% of students attending college or university work part-time (Donald & Meerkamper, 2004; Kramer & Usher; Marshall, 2010; Pike, Kuh, & Massa-McKinley, 2008; Tsangaris, 2015; Usalcas & Bowlby, 2006). In Canada, the percentage of students working while studying has almost doubled since 1976. Furthermore, the average student work week, is at an all-time high at sixteen hours per week (Marshall, 2010; Motte & Schwartz, 2009). Students report a
variety of reasons for working while studying; however, the primary reasons cited are: to supplement their income to meet monthly expenses, to earn extra money for personal spending, and to build marketable skills in a social environment (Baran, 2010; Darmody & Smyth, 2008; Lucas & Lammont, 1998; Marshall, 2010; Watts, 2002). It is clear that students are increasingly involved in some kind of employment while they are studying, and there is a need to explore this phenomenon more thoroughly in order to better understand the impact of working on the student experience.

The Nature of the Problem

The impact of part-time work on the student experience has proven to be a difficult topic to explore for several reasons. First, each individual student is unique in the way he/she perceives and functions within their environment, resulting in a wide range of learning and behaviours; thus, the ways in which a particular student engages with his/her environment depends on several factors including motivation, background, skills, and values (Astin, 1999; Chickering, Frank, & Robinson, 1996; Davies, 2000; Furr & Elling, 2000; Kezar, 2007; Lambert, Terenzini, & Lattuca, 2007; Pascarella, 1994; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Svanum & Bigatti, 2006). As Marshall (2010) states, “Analyzing the school/employment relationship is complicated because of unobservable variables such as personal motivation, time management and organizational skills, and self-confidence” (p. 5). Take, for example, two students working at a coffee shop: One student may see the job simply as a means of income, and show up shift-to-shift to in order to collect a pay cheque, whereas the other student may seize the opportunity to build her management skills by volunteering to train new staff, thereby acquiring marketable skills. Students also engage differently with their work environments depending on how far along they are in their academic programs: more mature students are consistently better able to balance their work and academic commitments (Salamonson, Everett, Koch, Andrew, & Davidson, 2012; Van de Water & Augenblick, 1987). The many factors involved in how students function within their environments have made it difficult to predict and/or describe potential outcomes of working part-time while studying (Marshall, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Svanum & Bigatti, 2006; Watts, 2002; Watts & Pickering, 2000b). We must therefore endeavor to better understand the idiosyncratic manner in which working students make
meaning of their on-the-job experiences, which contributes to the complexity of this phenomenon.

There is an extensive range of employment opportunities available to, and taken up by, students. This variability of employment adds another layer of complexity to this study and presents a second factor complicating any easy or comprehensive answer to the question of how student employment impacts the overall student experience. The employment options available to students are arguably broader than those available to non-students because universities often create their own economies and maintain a variety of positions exclusively available to current students (Kuh, 1995; Lucas & Lammont, 1998; Pascarella, 1998; Taylor, Smith, & Cooper, 1999). Furthermore, employers (both on- and off-campus) frequently view students as “flexible” employees, given the nature of their academic schedules, and this flexibility can also increase the variety of positions available to students seeking part-time work. This variability of employment means that one student may be conducting research relevant to their own course of study in a professor's on-campus lab, while another may be working off-campus in a fast paced restaurant. These employment experiences are so exceedingly different that it presents a significant challenge to any researcher seeking overall trends related to student employment.

In addition to qualitative differences in employment, the reality that students do not all work the same number of hours per week results in a quantitative difference which presents a third challenge to the present study of students' part-time work. The number of hours per week that a student works has been shown to be an important factor in the overall student-work equation, and has therefore already been the subject of many studies (Barke et al., 2000; Bella & Huba, 1982; Dundes & Marx, 2006; Hasson, McKenna, & Keeney, 2013; Kulm & Cramer, 2006; Pike et al., 2008; Salamonson et al., 2012). Some researchers suggest that students who limit their part-time work to less than twenty hours per week do not report lower grades, extended time at university, or other detrimental impacts (Cheng & Alcántara, 2007; Dundes & Marx, 2006; Pascarella, 1998). There is, however, a dark side to student employment, with working students reporting a number of negative effects including increased stress elevated levels of fatigue making it difficult to concentrate in class, missed lectures, and reduced study time (Curtis & Shani, 2002;
Existing research makes it clear that the relationship between hours worked and student outcomes is curvilinear. Thus, up to a certain point, working part-time may be associated with positive outcomes for students; however, there is a tipping point at which student employment becomes correlated with detrimental to student outcomes (Pascarella, 1998). Although such a ‘tipping point’ may exist, the variability of students’ circumstances makes it difficult to generalize about what the tipping point actually is, and to identify why this tipping point might vary between student workers.

The Study

While researchers have explored the connection between part-time work and various aspects of the student experience, they have primarily utilized survey based methods and have focused on how many hours students work in a week, the type and location of jobs, the relevance of the work to the students’ areas of study, and the compensation that students receive for their work (Besson & Wessel, 2002; Broadbridge & Swanson, 2005; Callender, 2008; Darmody & Smyth, 2008; Greenbank, Hepworth, & Mercer, 2009; Hunt, Lincoln, & Walker, 2004; Kuh, 1995; Salamonson et al., 2012; Wenz & Yu, 2010). Given the inherent complexity of the working student phenomenon, there is a need to find out more about the experiences of working students. Furthermore, consideration must be given to non-survey methodologies that will illuminate these experiences.

The present study is concerned with the impact of part-time work on the working student experience. In order to gather this information, I conducted interviews with working students in which I asked them to reflect on their experiences combining part-time work and full-time academic commitments. In this way, I have been able to reflect both on the impact of part-time work on the key areas identified above, and also on the meaning that students take away from their part-time work experiences.
An Overview of Methodology

In reviewing thirty years of student affairs literature, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded that “The evidence strongly suggests that…multiple forces operate in multiple settings to influence student learning and change” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 629). In this study, I examined working part-time as one of the multiple forces to which Pascarella and Terenzini have alluded. Furthermore, I designed my study using participant interviews in order to address a gap in the literature, which is currently predominantly survey-based. Data derived from these existing broad samples shed light on trends and correlations; however, broad trends may not adequately account for individual experiences, and even strong correlations do not indicate causation. Due to this gap, there is a need for other research methods to be applied in order to broaden the knowledge base in this area (Cheng & Alcántara, 2007). Rather than focus on overall trends and correlations, my research seeks to better understand the experiences of working students, as these experiences are conceived of by students themselves.

In order to access these student perspectives, I conducted in-depth interviews with sixteen business students currently enrolled in full-time studies in Simon Fraser University’s Beedie School of Business. My interviews were focused on addressing the following broad research question:

What do students perceive to be the main impact of working while attending university?

In addition to interviews, I collected data pertaining to the participants and their part-time roles in order to provide a detailed understanding of the range of student experiences represented by the study (Charmaz, 2014; Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007; Ford, Bosworth, & Wilson, 1995; Weiss, 1994). I will present a comprehensive explanation of the methodology used for this study in chapter 3.
Summary

The next chapter provides an in-depth review of the literature examining the relationship between work and various aspects of the overall student experience. Chapter 3 then presents the methodology I used to collect, code, and analyze my interview data, as well as my rationale for conducting the study according to these methods. In Chapter 4, I present a descriptive model, which provides a framework for the major themes that emerged from my interviews. Finally, Chapter 5 outlines how my findings both contribute to and contest the existing research in this field. Chapter 5 concludes with concrete recommendations for students to consider when selecting a part-time job, as well as for educators and employers as they learn to better support working students.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

In this chapter, I present the processes I used to locate relevant scholarly articles, which helped to shape my own research design and to support the empirical data of my study. Based on my review of this scholarly literature, I first outline the contextual factors that have influenced research in the area of part-time employment and post-secondary studies. I then present a review of relevant career development literature in order to contextualize students’ motivations for attending post-secondary given the prevalence of part-time employment amongst students in Canada (Canadian University Survey Consortium, 2013; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005; Weinrach, 1979). Next I present a summary and critique of the primarily correlational research literature, and examine the relationship between working part-time and factors associated with “student success” (Astin, 1993; Colbeck et al., 2003; Kuh & Schneider, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1998, 2000). Finally, I highlight the findings from studies that have sought to better understand the experiences of working students using focus groups and interviews, discuss gaps that exist in the literature, and present how my research design proposes to address them.

Search Process

In order to conduct my literature review, I employed a variety of search strategies including the following: 1. accessing on-line databases (for example, EBSCO, ERIC, JSTOR, Informaworld, and Emerald); 2. reviewing the reference lists of seminal research reports published in the field; and 3. seeking referrals to relevant scholarship in conversation with several university administrators and faculty members. When searching online databases, I used search terms including “student employment,” “student work,” “part-time work,” “post-graduation,” and “career” combined with “engagement,” “grade point average (GPA),” “skills,” and “health.” The key terms varied slightly when searching internationally; for example, in the United Kingdom (UK), researchers examining issues relating to student employment uses the phrase “term-time work” while researchers in Canada and the United States of America use the phrase “part-time work.” I limited my study to paid part-time work experiences, and thus did not include literature that pertained
to volunteer work or unpaid internship programs. I also excluded literature that pertained to structured work-study, internship, or co-operative education programs. Due to the limited number of studies involving working students, I did not limit my literature review to just university students, and included literature pertaining to college, technical schools, and other institutions of higher learning; I did not limit my review to just studies involving full-time students, but also included studies of part-time students as well. I examined the works cited by the preeminent scholars in my field as a way of cross-referencing my database findings. As a result of these efforts, I accessed over three hundred and fifty peer reviewed journal articles, university reports, strategy papers, and relevant conference proceedings, the most salient of which are reviewed below.

**Terminology**

In some cases, researchers use the word “impact” to imply causation. In this study, I chose to use the word “impact” to describe what students perceive to be the relationship between work and various aspects of their lives. In addition, I use the term “student experience” in the collective sense, to refer to the collective range of experiences that students have while attending university.

**Research into Student Employment**

There has been increased interest in the study of the student employee due to recent dramatic changes to the contexts in which students work. In the early 1990s, students in the United Kingdom experienced marked changes to the forms of support that they were able to access for their higher education. Specifically, responsibility for tuition was shifted from state to student, resulting in a drastic increase in the financial burden experienced by post-secondary students. This shift in tuition structure – along with increased enrolment in post-secondary education, deregulation in the labour market, and tuition hikes – contributed to a significant increase in student employment (Taylor et al., 1999; Watts & Pickering, 2000).
Pre-tuition reform employment rates in the UK show less than half (47%) of all full-time students working part-time, while post-reform rates jump to 58% within a few years (Little, Moon, Pierce, Harvey, & Marlow-Hayne, 2001; Taylor et al., 1999). This shift caught the attention of researchers, who became interested in monitoring the impact that working while studying had on students. As a result, there is considerable UK data related to student employment and the impact of this employment on academic performance and skill development. In contrast, student employment rates in North America have been elevated for many years – already as high as 45% in 1959 – and although they have continued to rise, they have done so much more gradually than in the UK (Curtis & Lucas, 2001; Felstead, Krahn, & Powell, 1999; Stern & Nakata, 1991). The consistently high level of student employment in North America may account for the comparative lack of research conducted in this area: Researchers in North America may have simply focused their attention on other factors pertaining to the student experience. Although the North American context is lacking the dramatic “turning point” seen in the UK, student employment has been on the rise. In fact, over the past thirty-five years in Canada, “the employment rate among full-time postsecondary students increased from approximately one in four, to just under one in two” (Marshall, 2010, p. 7). Increases in student employment in the UK, US and Canada may be tied to a number of factors, including tuition fees growing at a faster rate than inflation, reduced federal financial aid, more competition for scholarships and bursaries, and the shift of funding from state to student (King & Bannon, 2002; Ouellette, 2006; Watts & Pickering, 2000).

As noted above, the proportion of students working part-time while attending post-secondary programs in Canada is higher than ever before (Marshall, 2010). Furthermore, the majority of students who now enroll in Canadian post-secondary programs cite “furthering their careers” and “getting a better job” as the two primary reasons for pursuing post-secondary education (Canadian University Survey Consortium, 2013). Given this keen focus from students on their careers, a review of career development theory will provide a foundation for understanding the student experience, and will further serve as a backdrop from which to critique studies exploring the relationships between work and the student experience.
Career Development: A Context for Employability

In his seminal research, Weinrach (1979) presents two broad approaches to career development. The first, and earliest, approach includes the constellation of theorists who posit a link between characteristics, or traits, of the person and factors in the workplace. Weinrach refers to these theorists as “structural,” and includes in this category theories that use psychometric instruments and matrices to establish the link between people and types of work (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005; Weinrach, 1979). Holland’s Theory of Vocational Choice (1959) is an example of this approach. According to Holland’s theory, an individual can be characterized as belonging to one of six personality types. These types are then linked to occupations that align with the personality traits of the individual; the higher the degree of “fit” between person and occupation, the higher the chances of career success and satisfaction for the individual (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). The matching that informs Holland’s theory and other structural approaches is limited because it may not account for the complexities of the individual or the occupation being assessed, and it is made at one particular point in the individual’s development (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005; Weinrach, 1979).

Weinrach (1979) describes the second broad group of career development theories as “process” approaches. These theories tend to focus on how careers evolve and develop over time. Process approaches are distinguished from structural approaches, such as trait-factor theory, because they do not provide “…any explicit link between the individual and the world of work” (Weinrach, 1979, p.123). Super’s Theory of Vocational Development (1957) fits into this category, as it proposes that individuals, and the contexts in which they live and work, evolve over time. As a result of this evolution, Super (1980) suggests, career decision-making and development are continuous processes. The major criticism of the “process” approaches is that this family of theories – while re-contextualizing career as a life-long phenomenon, rather than as a decision made at a single point in time – still does not address individual complexity and the nature of decision-making processes within highly variable contexts (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005; Weinrach, 1979). Career counsellors utilizing these “process” approaches may need to pay particular attention to developmental and cultural contexts, particularly when working with diverse populations (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005).
Since Weinrach’s writings, career theorists have turned their attention to the complexity of the individual and the environment, utilizing concepts such as “planned happenstance” and “chaos theory” to bring a different perspective to the process of career development (McKay, Bright, & Pryor, 2005; Mitchell et al., 1999; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). For example, Mitchell, Levin, and Krumboltz (1999) posit that chance plays an important role in career development, and suggest that, while unpredictable events have influenced the career direction of the majority of individuals, “career counselors rarely discuss unexpected or chance events with their clients” (Mitchell et al., 1999, p. 116). Thus, Mitchell, Levin, and Krumboltz’s (1999) approach to career counselling recognizes the complexity of environmental factors, encourages individuals to expose themselves to chance events, and advises them to be prepared to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves as a result of such “chance encounters.” What’s more, their research identifies a strong need for career counsellors to explore the topic of chance with their clients.

It is evident that early and simplistic notions of career development still have their place in practice; indeed, it is hard to ignore the contributions of researchers like Parsons, Holland, and others to the field of career development theory (Holland, 1959; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005; Weinrach, 1979). However, these theorists are dependent on methodologies that utilize assessment, survey, and correlation data to ascertain linkages between individuals and their careers. As noted by more contemporary career development theorists, an individual’s career is much more complicated than may have been previously suggested using the “trait-factor” approach (Krumboltz, 1996; Krumboltz, 2009; McKay et al., 2005). Applying such an approach to learning more about the impact of work on the student experience would fall short of conveying the meaning that working students make of the experiences that serve to develop their careers. Understanding the complexity of the working student experience therefore calls for a contemporary approach to conceptualizing career development.
Understanding the Impact of Work on Student Success: Structuralist Perspectives

Much of the research exploring the impact of work on student success can be likened to structuralist approaches to career development, where career development theorists sought to determine the “fit” between individuals and work environments. The overwhelming majority of the sources that I reviewed for this study used correlational research methods to examine the relationships between part-time work and factors that have been most often associated with “student success”, such as GPA, health, engagement, and skill development (Astin, 1993; Colbeck et al., 2003; Kuh & Schneider, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1998, 2000). In the next section I will describe some of the major themes that have been found using correlation analysis. I will then describe studies that paint a more complete, and contemporary, picture of the working student experience by utilizing methodologies that include interviews and focus group. Finally, I will identify the gaps that exist in the current scholarly understanding of the experience of working part-time while going to school.

Student Employment and GPA

The relationship between working and grade point average (GPA) is one of the most well researched areas in the student employment literature (Barke et al., 2000; Carney, McNeish, & McColl, 2005; Curtis & Nimmer, 1991; Curtis & Williams, 2002; Greenbank et al., 2009; Humphrey, 2006; Metcalf, 2003; Taylor et al., 1999). This may be because of the importance students, and the university community place on GPA. For students, GPA determines initial and continued funding through scholarships and it plays a critical role in entrance to graduate and experiential learning programs, such as cooperative education, field schools, and internships. GPA is also important for varsity athletes who may be removed from their athletic programs if they do not maintain a minimum GPA – a situation with significant financial, social, and career ramifications. Indeed, students, parents, faculty, and employers have all come to recognize GPA as an important indicator of success for students, representing, as it does, both the success that they have achieved in their courses and the success that they may be able to achieve upon graduation. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) support the scholarly attention given to
grades, calling GPA the “lingua franca” or “common language” of the instructional world (p. 396). Furthermore, GPA can play an important role in securing employment upon graduation (Dundes & Marx, 2006). The significant research attention devoted to GPA may therefore be understood as stemming from the importance placed on it as a marker of academic achievement, and on the potential threat that working part-time poses to it.

In the following section, I discuss the existing findings about the relationship between part-time work and GPA. As there are a large number of studies on this topic, I will divide the studies into two broad categories based on sample size (large n>500, small n<500).

Large National Samples

Studies such as the American National Longitudinal Study (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015) use large scale national data sets to track a number of variables relating to the student experience, including both part-time work and GPAs. The main advantage of large samples is the ability to generalize to a larger population, yet large surveys often lack the depth needed to shed light on a complex research problem (Wenz & Yu, 2010). The majority of the research studies conducted using data from large national samples conclude that there is a negative correlation between part-time work and GPA (Barke et al., 2000; Callender, 2008; Ehrenberg & Sherman, 1987; Hunt et al., 2004; Little et al., 2001; Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003; Svanum & Bigatti, 2006; Wenz & Yu, 2010). For example, King and Bannon (2002) used data from the 1999-2000 National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey (NPSAS), which consists of responses from approximately fifty thousand undergraduate students attending four-year institutions, to determine the relationship between working and GPA. Their results indicated that working part-time has “a negative impact has a negative impact on many students’ academics and overall college experience” (King & Bannon, 2002, p. 3). Another finding of many large national samples was that as students worked more (hours/week), they were more likely to report negative impact on their grades (King & Bannon, 2002). For example, according to the Canadian University Survey Consortium (2015) survey of graduating students (n=18,144), students who worked 20 hours a week generally reported a somewhat negative impact, while those working 25 hours per week reported a very negative impact.
The relationship between hours worked and GPA was also examined in Orszag, Orszag, and Whitmore’s (2001) report, which draws on national data collected by the US Department of Education Statistics. Orszag et al. (2001) show that when students worked more than twenty-one hours per week, their academic performance was lower than those who did not work (Orszag et al., 2001). Although it is a dated study, it is worthwhile to note that Ehrenberg and Sherman (1987) had similar results (but with a slightly higher threshold for weekly work hours) when they analyzed data from the 1972-1979 National Longitudinal Study (NLS). Data from the NLS show that students who worked less than twenty-five hours per week did not report lower GPAs (Ehrenberg & Sherman, 1987). Researchers in Scotland examining the relationship between student employment, mental and physical health, and academic performance, also concluded that students link working more hours at their part-time jobs with lower grades (Carney et al., 2005). In fact, the majority of the students surveyed in Carney et al. (n=1600) associated increased employment hours with lower grades, regardless of how many hours per week they worked. In the UK, an analysis of exam results showed that the mean percentage grade on examinations for students engaging in part-time employment was 1.7 percentage points lower for females, and 2.7 lower for males, as compared to their unemployed peers (Barke et al., 2000).

Results from large datasets utilising survey methodology and national samples generally illustrate a curvilinear relationship between hours worked and grades. Thus, working up to a certain number of hours may not be associated with lower grades, and in some studies, may even be linked to improved academic performance; however, when a threshold of hours worked per week is breached, grades may suffer. The point at which the impact shifts from no impact, to positive, to negative varies depending on a number of student and environmental variables such as academic course load, commute time, and location of employer, among other things. Smaller institution or population-specific studies may complement large-scale studies by further exploring the variety of factors which may influence the relationship between part-time work and GPA by narrowing the context of the environment, or population.
Small Institutional Samples

The literature that I reviewed that focused on smaller sample populations generally included between fifty and five hundred participants from a single academic institution, an approach that allows for a deeper exploration of the impact of part-time work on a subset of the working student population.

When examining the employment trends for 256 undergraduate students at a private liberal arts campus in the United States, Dundes and Marx (2006) found that there was no drop in the achievement scores associated with working. In fact, the data suggested that those students who worked between ten and nineteen hours per week were more likely to excel academically (Dundes and Marx, 2006). Students working in this range (10-19 hours) tended to agree that employment had forced them to become more organized, a trend which may explain their academic superiority as compared to others in the study (Dundes & Marx, 2006).

Contrary to the study by Dundes and Marx (2006) noted above, Manthei and Gilmore’s (2005) study on the experience of eighty-three students from a small liberal arts college in Canterbury, New Zealand noted negative impacts of part-time work on academic performance. Specifically, the majority of the students surveyed felt that part-time employment had adversely affected participants’ “standard of academic work” and, furthermore, had reduced the amount of time they could dedicate to socializing, pursuing recreational/leisure pursuits, and studying (Manthei & Gilmore, 2005, p.213). However, 60% of these students also stated that their employment had resulted in improved organization and efficiency and had helped them to gain valuable life skills.

In most cases, smaller studies incorporating students’ self-reported data show that students associate part-time employment with lower grades (Furr & Elling, 2000; Humphrey, 2006; Kulm & Cramer, 2006; Svanum & Bigatti, 2006). However, many of these studies also report that, if kept to a manageable range of hours, part-time employment can provide many benefits to students. Furthermore, these studies posit that the benefits that students experience through part-time work, such as improved time management skills, can have a positive overall academic impact, as measured by
students’ GPAs (see, for example, Curtis & Shani, 2002; Dundes & Marx, 2006; and Manthei & Gilmore, 2005).

**Student Employment and Engagement with the On- and Off-Campus Communities**

The construct of student engagement has been evolving across the scholarly literature for over seventy years (Astin, 1984; Chickering, McDowell, & Campagna, 1969; Kuh, 2009; Pace, 1984; Tinto, 1975). According to the Glossary of Educational Reform (Abbott, 2015), student engagement is defined as “…the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education” (para.1). Kuh et al. (2009) posit that the more students are engaged with their learning environments, the more they learn and develop as students; using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), researchers can measure levels of student engagement by assessing the degree to which students engage with activities and pursuits that have been show to promote learning. For example, NSSE data suggests that meaningful conversations with faculty members play an important role in students’ levels of engagement; thus, more time interacting with faculty members may equate to higher levels of overall student learning and development (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005).

To date, only a few researchers have looked into how student employment affects, and potentially impairs, student engagement. Given that the NSSE is relatively new, this gap in the literature should perhaps come as no surprise. In Canada, universities and colleges have only been subscribing to NSSE since 2003, with The University of British Columbia being the first to join the Canadian NSSE network (University of British Columbia, 2006).

During the past twelve years of affiliation with the NSSE, the research community has devoted significant attention to other independent variables, such as the connection between student learning and faculty interaction. Kuh (2007b) suggests that students benefit from this faculty interaction in a variety of ways, “not the least of which is having another source of support and encouragement for persevering when times get tough” (p.
Based on the data reported by the NSSE, students who work part-time on-campus with faculty members may therefore be more engaged than those who work off-campus in roles that do not provide opportunities to interact with faculty members in meaningful ways.

Pike, Kuh, and Massa-McKinley’s (2008) study is one of the few that uses NSSE data to directly examine the impact of part-time employment on student engagement. In keeping with the studies already cited, a curvilinear relationship was found between student employment and academic performance: students who worked up to twenty hours per week had higher GPAs, while students who worked in excess of twenty hours per week reported significantly lower grades (Pike et al., 2008). However, Pike et al. (2008) emphasize that students who work less than twenty hours per week and work on-campus may be more likely to participate in extra-curricular learning activities and experience positive interactions with faculty members, two factors that are positively associated with student engagement.

Lundberg’s study (2004), which used a national sample (n=3,744) to examine involvement levels for students working off-campus, found that the number of hours students worked off-campus had a negative effect on their engagement with peers and faculty in terms of less peer teaching, less engagement with peers on non-academic issues, less satisfaction with student relationships, and less frequency of interaction with faculty. (p. 209)

Tannock and Flocks (2003) reported a similar finding, noting that their participants were not able to spend time on-campus in the ways they wanted to due to work commitments. Students need to be present in lectures, have time for background reading and test preparation, and be able to hand in assignments on time in order to succeed academically; part-time work is often seen by students as a barrier for each of these crucial academic areas (Curtis & Williams, 2002; Long & Hayden, 2009).

Several scholars have suggested that working students may have less time than non-working students to engage with the campus community in meaningful ways (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1991; Kuh, 2009; Pike et al., 2008). Indeed, busy work schedules may make it difficult for working students to attend classes, participate in on-campus activities, and
have meaningful conversations with staff and faculty, both inside and outside the classroom; however, more research is needed in this area to establish a better understanding of the relationship between part-time work, both on- and off-campus, and overall student engagement.

**Student Employment and Skill Acquisition**

Employers have been quick to question the post-graduation employability of students, noting a gap between what is needed in the workplace and the skills new graduates possess (McLaughlin, 1995; Neill, Mulholland, Ross, & Leckey, 2004; Uden, Moran, Solutions, & Hse, 2007). Over the last twenty years, several marked shifts in the economy have had an impact on the skills required to successfully contribute to the workplace (Davies, 2000; Felstead et al., 1999; Harvey, 2005; Hodgson & Spours, 2001; Symes, Boud, McIntyre, Solomon, & Tennant, 2000). These shifts include the saturation of undergraduate degree holders in the market; the gradual shift from full-time continuous employment to more contract based, temporary employment; and the flattening of organizational structures, requiring employees to take on broader workloads (Brennan & Council, 2005, p. b12; Harvey, 2002). In Canada, more and more graduates are securing employment, and may require a broader skillset due to the small number of employees present within these organizations. In addition, globalization and access to skilled workers via the internet using employment platforms like “E-lance” and “Hire the World,” have also increased the competitive nature of the job market: students are no longer competing only with local graduates, but are now also faced with a globalized economy that pits them against national and international graduates. This employment reality requires that prospective employees have broad, well-developed skill sets in order to stand out amongst an increasingly large pool of qualified candidates (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013).

Researchers in the United Kingdom (UK) have also recognized the important connection between skills and post-graduation employability. The Dearing Report, formally known as the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, was produced in 1997 to help guide the future of post-secondary education in the UK. The research collected through this committee and the resulting reports place an increasing emphasis on the skills that new graduates will need to be successful in a changing world of work.
Skills that are seen to be relevant to a student’s employability include traditional intellectual skills, key skills of numeracy, communication skills, learning skills, skill with information technology, and knowledge of how organizations work (Little, 2002). Recently in the UK, post-secondary institutions have worked to include employability skills into the undergraduate curriculum (Bridgstock, 2009; Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick, & Cragnolini, 2004; Harvey, 2005). This holistic approach is being accomplished by embedding attribute development in individual programs, enhancing and revising central support through student affairs, improving academic/work experience opportunities, and encouraging students to reflect on and record their skill-building experiences (Harvey, 2005). Through this approach, graduates may be better equipped to secure employment in a competitive post-graduation market.

**What Do Employers Want?**

As funders of public education, employers have been quick to criticize and question the value of a liberal arts education, and have called for the infusion of “practical” program elements that will assist in the development of skills that are of value in the workplace (Davies, 2000). Students are also increasingly expressing interest in concurrent programs and experiences that will make them more marketable upon graduation, a trend that reflects the reality that the majority of students now enrolling in post-secondary programs cite “furthering their careers” and “getting a better job” as two primary reasons for their studies (Canadian University Survey Consortium, 2013). Clearly, if student employment affords these skill-building experiences then pairing post-secondary studies with part-time employment may be an important way of fulfilling both students’ and employers’ demands for skill development. Furthermore, all other factors being equal, it may be graduates who have developed skills through part-time employment who secure employment first.

Employers recognize that student employment can be an important source of transferrable skills (Little, 2006; Neill et al., 2004). Employers surveyed by Neill et al. (2004) noted that, in some cases, potential hires could compensate for a weaker academic profile by presenting with well-developed soft skills (such as interpersonal and conflict resolution skills), and that the presence or absence of part-time work on a candidate’s application could make the difference between being hired or not. Another research study
involving over two hundred and fifty in-depth interviews with strategic and line managers from more than ninety organizations found that employers strongly believe that work experience makes a valuable contribution to the development of relevant skills including teamwork, communication, and interpersonal skills, as well as an awareness of workplace culture (Harvey, Moon, Geall, & Bower, 1997; Little, 2006). Despite these promising connections between part-time employment and post-graduate employability, more research is needed to establish if students who work while attending school actually gain a significant employment advantage over their non-working peers.

Benefits of Student Employment: A Skill Building Opportunity

Despite the conflicting results that arise across the scholarly literature regarding the impacts of student employment, researchers looking into the relationship between student employment and skill development have overwhelmingly established a positive correlation between the two (Belcheir, 2001; Curtis & Lucas, 2001; Davies, 2000; Fallows & Steven, 2000; Greenbank et al., 2009; McLaughlin, 1995; Neill et al., 2004; Symes et al., 2000). For example, Manthei and Gilmore (2005) note that it was typical for students in their study to view skill acquisition as a primary reason for working. As one student in their study commented, “You learn very useful skills: time management, people skills, commitment, socialization with workmates and the general public” (Manthei & Gilmore, 2005, p. 208). McInnis and Hartley’s (2006) also noted this trend in their study, which involved 1,563 undergraduate students in Australia. Although the participants in McInnis and Hartley’s study noted some negative aspects of their part-time work, overall their positive experiences outweighed the negative. These positive experiences included obtaining general workplace knowledge, having opportunities to gain a range of workplace and organizational skills, and developing a sense of independence (McInnis & Hartley, 2006). Curtis and Lucas (2001) reinforce the connection between part-time employment and skill development, stating that

Aside from potential future benefits, students gain transferable skills immediately as a result of their employment including managing and working with others, dealing with customers and self-management. The enhanced skills and confidence assist them in their studies and the enjoyment of the job increased social contact. (p. 51)
Students who work part-time do encounter challenges with managing the extra responsibilities associated with their jobs; however, with these extra responsibilities comes the opportunity to develop skills that may assist them both in their studies and post-graduation.

While researchers have identified a positive correlation between part-time work and skill development, there are some outstanding questions that have yet to be addressed. For instance, why (or how) do some working students learn more on the job, or at a faster rate, than others? What role does the employer, or the nature of the job, play in this learning? More research is needed to address these unanswered questions and thereby allow us to better understand the workplace factors (e.g. supervision, on the job training, nature of the role, etc.) that are most significant for skill acquisition.

**Student Employment and Physical and Mental Health**

While very few studies are focused exclusively on part-time work and student health, several studies that focus on other impacts of students’ part-time work include findings in this area. For example, a Trades Union Congress survey in the UK found that of the 72% of students working while studying, 26% had missed lectures and 16% had failed to submit coursework because of student employment commitments; overall, the majority of students in this study found that work was associated with lower grades and higher levels of fatigue due to a lack of time to dedicate to course work and a “tiredness induced by combining academic work with paid work” (Curtis & Lucas, 2001, p.42). Researchers have also shown that students who are working part-time may experience elevated levels of stress, reduced sleep, and other detrimental impacts on their health, which are primarily associated with reduced time to live healthy lives and stress stemming from academic pressures (Carney et al., 2005; Curtis, 2007; Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, & Phillips, 1990; Robotham, 2009).

Other researchers have also shown a connection between students’ physical and mental health, citing fatigue, impaired cognitive ability, and increased overall levels of stress experienced by students who work part-time (Darmody & Smyth, 2008; Hunt et al., 2004; Neill et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 1999). Carney, McNeilis, and McColl’s (2005) review
of the impact of part-time employment on students’ mental and physical health is arguably the most in-depth study in this area of research. The report by Carney, McNeish, and McColl (2005) begins by establishing that the student population is significantly below the norm for all aspects of health, except physical functioning. They then investigated the relationship between part-time work and students’ mental and physical health and determined that a small yet significant negative correlation existed, which was aggravated by working longer hours (Carney et al., 2005). These researchers also noted that students with increased mental health scores (better mental health) were less likely to link working with poorer academic performance (Carney et al., 2005). This finding suggests that students who are in a more positive mental state may be able to cope more effectively with the added stress of working. Alternatively, it may imply that these students have found healthy ways of coping with the added stress of part-time work (Carney et al., 2005). This body of research suggests that being a student is an inherently stressful occupation and that the addition of part-time work to academic studies, if not managed in a healthy manner, can increase stress levels and therefore negatively impact both mental and physical health.

The growing trend of students working part-time while studying means that the relationship between such employment and mental health is an important avenue for future research (Robotham, 2012). Indeed, researchers have established that there is a connection between part-time work and students’ overall health (including both mental and physical health), however, more focused and in-depth research is required to help us understand the complexities of this connection (Carney et al., 2005; Curtis, 2007; Curtis & Lucas, 2001; Macan et al., 1990; Robotham, 2009).

**Summary and Critique: Structuralist Perspectives**

The literature reviewed above roughly parallels Weinrach’s (1979) “structuralist” notions of career development in that they make explicit linkages between characteristics of the student experience (hours worked), and factors associated with student success. This presents several problems, as correlational studies such as those conducted by King and Bannon (2002), Ehrenberg and Sherman (1987), and Carney, McNeish, and McColl (2005) do not allow the reader to infer causation from the results, and do not take into
account unique contextual factors of the working student experience. In addition, most of
the studies above report results from one point in time, and use student self-report data,
which in some cases may be inaccurate. For example, in reviewing the validity of self-
reported GPA, class ranks and test scores, Kuncel, Crede and Thomas (2005) reported
that self-report grades “should be used with caution” (p.63). Despite these shortcomings,
researchers adopting a “structuralist” like approach have highlighted four clear factors
presented above (namely impact on GPA, engagement, skill development, and health)
that may serve to guide further research in this area.

The studies reviewed in the following section utilize research methods in line with
contemporary career development theorists, such as Pryor and Bright (2003) and
Krumboltz (2009) and aim to explore the working student experience, including the
complexities associated with not only individuals, but also with their environments. As with
contemporary career development methodology, the following studies utilize interviews
and focus groups as the primary tools to allow working students to describe their
experiences.

Exploring the Richness of the Working Student Experience

Working part-time as a student is an experience with a range of implications and
is approached and felt differently by each student given his/her own context, personality,
and academic and work environments. Given this diversity of experience (or what I will
refer to as “richness”), comes a need for researchers to utilize methods such as focus
groups and interviews, to complement the existing literature on working students, which
primarily stems from survey-based research. Tannock and Flocks (2003) captured this
richness through their conversational interviews with forty-five working students at a small
urban college in Northern California. As they explain, “All of the students we spoke with
had tales to tell of their workplace difficulties: of having to handle abusive managers and
customers; sexual harassment and race discrimination; low pay and no benefits;
scheduling and job insecurities…” (Tannock & Flocks, 2003, p.3). It is through methods
such as conversational interviews that these kinds of “tales” are evoked and it is precisely
this deep understanding of work on the student experience that will enrich our existing
scholarly knowledge in this area.
Tannock and Flocks’ (2003) study showcases the value of these methodologies in specific research contexts, and the range of themes that researchers are able to identify that aren’t otherwise seen in surveys. Tannock and Flocks (2003) conducted their research at an urban community college serving a population of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The forty-five working student participants in their study are described as “marginalized and harassed” and it is clear from the study that their jobs are potentially hazardous. The overall tone of the article is bleak, and perhaps best represented by a quotation from one of its participants: “It’s ironic that you go to school to better yourself, but while you’re in school, you’re at the bottom of the bottom with bad jobs, no benefits, and no help to get you through” (Tannock & Flocks, 2003, p. 1). These participants reported being pressed for time and many described feeling trapped in low-income roles unrelated to their fields of study. In contrast, Watts and Pickering’s (2000) study, involving first year business students at the University of Brighton, reported more of a range of experiences. During an interview, one participant shared that working made it very difficult to take part in structured social activities such as “joining the university orchestra or participating in the sports programme”; however, another participant tied her part-time job to an increase in her social circle, which helped her to create a stable and beneficial “…life away from ‘uni’” (Watts & Pickering, 2000, p. 131). Comments from Tannock and Flocks (2003) and Watts and Pickering (2000) highlight the richly idiosyncratic ways in which students experience the work/school dynamic, and the impact that context may have on the working student experience.

Consistent with contemporary career development theorists, some recent research in the area of working students has placed a significant emphasis on student experiences, and the manner in which working contributes to a student’s thoughts and plans about his/her unfolding career. For example, in Cheng and Alcántara’s (2007) study, participants link their experiences at work, and with extra-curricular activities to post-graduation employment and career plans. To facilitate this connection, Cheng and Alcántara draw on the work of Palomba and Banta (1999) who suggest that “knowing where students wind up is only part of the story; information about where they start and what they encounter along the way is also necessary” (as cited in Cheng & Alcátara, 2007, p. 5). In contrast with the dark tone of Tannock and Flocks’ (2003) research, none of the participants in Cheng and Alcántara’s (2007) study believed that working had a negative impact on their
academic performance. In fact, participants believed that working had helped shape their academic interests and had influenced their projected post-graduation career choices. Furthermore, participants felt that they were in a much stronger position, vis-à-vis post-graduation employability, than their peers who did not work, because, as the study explains, “work had given them opportunities to gain insight into the job market, real world experiences, and inside track information on their selected professions” (Cheng & Alcántara, 2007, p. 306). Hasson, Mckenna, and Keeney (2013) support this finding, noting that nursing students working part-time in the field found it particularly valuable because it exposed them to the practice of nursing “on the ground,” thereby allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of the profession. In addition, student nurses in the study reported that they were better prepared than their non-working colleagues for the sometimes tough realities in the ward (Hasson et al., 2013). The students who participated in both Cheng and Alcantara (2013) and Hasson, McKenna and Keeney’s (2013) studies shared a number of specific benefits derived from their work experiences including improved time management skills and boosted self-confidence. The findings of these studies help us understand how working part-time contributes to skill development, but more importantly, suggest that working students may have tangible opportunities to re-contextualize their careers by engaging with events, experiences and opportunities at work.

Summary: Contemporary Perspectives

Two main themes emerged from reviewing studies exploring the richness of the working student experience. First, in-line with contemporary career development theorists, these studies contribute an additional layer of depth, and scope to our understanding of how work impacts the student experience by empowering participants to share, in their own language, the meaning they make from their work environments. In the studies noted above, participants described how working part-time contributed to a more balanced life away from university, added to their sense of helplessness by being trapped in low paying jobs unrelated to their field of study, or provided valuable insights into the post-graduation job market. This range of experiences is difficult to account for in survey design. Second, studies exploring the richness of the working student experience present findings that are not tied to one point in time. Thus, while survey-based researchers have identified a link
between part-time work and skill development at one static point in time (see, for example, (Curtis & Lucas, 2001; Davies, 2000; Fallows & Steven, 2000), Cheng and Alcántara’s research (2007), has been able to expand on this finding by describing the dynamic link between skill development and participants’ unfolding career paths. In contrast to the difficulties inherent in correlational research, methods such as interviews and focus groups provide a direct pathway to what modern career theorists value: the unique perspective of each working student.

Conclusion

Structural theories of career development have shed light on certain aspects of the impact of work on the student experience. For example, an analysis of the existing survey-based literature examining the impact of work on the student experience suggests that there are both advantages and disadvantages to working part-time, and that the balance of advantages and disadvantages experienced depends significantly on the number of hours worked per week: past a threshold of approximately eighteen to twenty hours per week, the more a student works, the more likely s/he is to report adverse impacts on GPA, health, and the ability to engage with the campus community. This finding, alongside other significant correlations, provides a starting point for understanding the working student; however, such correlations fall short when it comes to understanding the cause of these impacts, or describing the contexts in which they occur.

Clearly, there is no “universal” experience of student employment, as demonstrated by the tremendous variability that researchers have discovered when considering the impact of part-time employment on students’ academic achievements. Modern career development theorists recognize the need to move away from the assumption of large group commonality, in order to appreciate increasingly unique and personal understandings of career development. Thus, if we want to better understand the impact of work on the student experience then we need to approach it in ways that allow us to understand the meaning that students make of their own experiences. As we have seen with the shift in career development theories, such an approach must account for both individual and environmental complexity and the randomness of opportunity.
My analysis of the extant literature suggests that some important research gaps remain: namely, there continue to be relatively few researchers approaching this phenomenon with the focus being on a deeper exploration of the working student experience. Providing working students an opportunity to describe the meaning they make from the impact of work and school will ultimately lead to a more complete understanding of the issue, which will narrow the research gap that currently exists. My study engages with these gaps in the literature by conducting participant interviews with students from a Canadian institution. My study's central aim is to understand students’ own rich, complex, and context-dependent perspectives of their work experiences while also honouring the four core issues that have been thoroughly documented and established throughout the literature. Participants in my study will be asked to comment on how work has impacted their GPAs, skill development, health and engagement, but they will also be afforded opportunities to describe, in their own words, other factors that have shaped their experiences. It is my intention that the nature and structure of my interviews will allow for the emergence of unexpected and perhaps even previously unconsidered aspects of the working student experience. Given that the number of working students is on the rise, there is an ongoing need to improve our understanding of, and therefore our approach to, the working student experience.

In describing his approach to research methods, Winkler (2009) states, “In order to explore the various aspects that are relevant for students when reflecting on their term-time job, it was important to highlight individual perception and to maintain a certain degree of flexibility within the research design” (p.127). In the next section, I will outline how I explored the impact of work on the student experience, and how I maintained a high degree of flexibility within my research design while pursuing my central research question, “What is the impact of part-time work on the student experience?”
Chapter 3. Methodology

Chapter Overview

I conducted this research to better understand the experiences of full-time undergraduate business students who work. With a greater proportion of students working part-time, I felt there was a need to supplement the existing body of literature with data that took a deeper look at the experiences of these students. Results from the study may lead to changes in the way university staff, faculty, as well as employers support working students.

In this chapter I first outline my philosophical perspective and the nature of the research problem. I then present the research question and my rationale for interviewing students, and conducting the study in the manner outlined below. During the course of this chapter, I also discuss participant eligibility, recruitment and selection, ethical considerations and outline the three-stage data collection process I utilized to engage with the student participants and collect the data. Finally, I end the chapter by outlining the step-by-step process I used to analyze the data, and present the limitations of the study.

My Perspective as a Researcher

My research is in line with the constructivist epistemological view, which is premised on the notion that people construct meaning from their surroundings through a subjective lens unique to them (Bryman, 1984; Hogan, 2010; Holden & Lynch, 2004; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Smith, 1983). As a professional counsellor, this is the stance that I take with my counselling clients on a daily basis as I work with them to better understand and make meaning of various aspects of their lives. As a counsellor, I align my practice with the contemporary career theorists described in the previous chapter, such as Krumboltz (2009) and McKay and Bright (2005) as these theorists place individual and environmental contexts at the centre of their theories, and recognize how chance, and random occurrences can play a role in career development. My experience working with clients in career transition, combined with nine years working
in and running university career centres and the ongoing professional training I have received in counselling, serve as the foundation of my professional competence from which I explore the meaning students make of working and studying.

My background may have also contributed to certain biases, or preferences, which impacted the way I approached the research problem, designed the story, and interpreted the stories and experiences student participants shared with me during the interviews (Ahern, 1999; Fischer, 2009; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013; Tufford & Newman, 2012). Tufford and Newman (2012) state that the qualitative researcher, as the “instrument for analysis across all phases of the research project,” may influence how data is collected and interpreted, and that every effort should be made to bracket potential biases (by attempting to identify them and set them aside) that may jeopardize the rigour of the study (2012, p. 81). For example, there were times during the interview process where I felt the career counsellor in me wanting to help guide the participant, or times where I wanted to challenge the individual’s job choice; over the course of the study, my ability to bracket these tendencies, particularly during the participant interviews, improved. By identifying and keeping my tendencies in check through bracketing, I was able to draw forth a more accurate picture of the participants’ experiences during data analysis and interpretation which will be outlined in greater detail below.

Much of the existing literature exploring the relationship between students and work tend to examine facets of the student as isolated constructs, drawing connections, for instance, between the number of hours they work and their GPAs, engagement with the on- and off-campus communities, and/or health. My ontological view is that every student experiences working and studying in a different manner, based on their experiences, culture, prior academic and work experiences. The facets that make them unique contribute to the way they make meaning from their surroundings. While two students may work the same number of hours per week, and may have identical cumulative grade point averages, these students may move through this process in completely different ways (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). Thus, a need exists to further explore the experiences of working students using research methods, such as interviews, that will draw forth their idiosyncratic experiences.
My Approach to Research

My goal with this research project was not to “identify causal explanations and fundamental laws that explain regularities in human social behaviour” (Easterby-Smith, 1991, p. 23), but to understand and describe the impact of part-time work on the working student experience (Bryman, 1984; Darlaston-Jones, 2007; Holden & Lynch, 2004).

In conducting preliminary research for this study, I was intrigued by the large number of survey based studies in this area. My first thought was to construct a study using secondary data from a national sample, like the National Survey of Student Engagement, and compare this to student records indicating grade point average (GPA) and academic course load. From this comparison, I believed I would be able to see if, and to what degree, part-time work was associated with engagement, and to see how this association was affected by variables such as hours worked per week and academic course load. However, after comparing and contrasting the qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, revisiting the existing body of literature in this area, it became clear that another approach was required for five main reasons. First, applying such a narrow focus to the experience of working, for example linking GPA to hours worked, would effectively eliminate the richness of the individual experience from the process and most certainly exclude other factors that could help me better understand the working student; adopting this methodology was also clearly not in line with my philosophical views. Second, in reviewing the literature, I noticed very few studies taking a deeper look into the lives of working student and exploring this richness. Third, while studies with large sample sizes, utilizing survey and existing databases confirmed that working was associated with various factors of student success, they also left me with many questions concerning how the working student constructed their reality. Fourth, as I revisited relevant articles, I found the smaller, more in depth studies which included direct quotes from working student interviews much more interesting as they went deeper in their description of the experience and shed light on the ‘why’ (Taylor et al., 1999). Finally, it was important to maintain alignment between my philosophical beliefs, outlined above, and choice of methods.
What became clearer through this exploratory process was that there was an opportunity for me to use existing data sources, primarily large data sets from survey based research projects, as a base from which to dig deeper into the working student experience. For example, many of the large surveys suggest that a connection exists between the number of hours worked and academic success (Ehrenberg & Sherman, 1987; King & Bannon, 2002; Orszag et al., 2001). While these results may contribute to understanding how working may affect grade point average, there are limitations in describing why this relationship exists, or how participants describe the reasons behind the correlation. Thus, I anchored my primary research questions in themes existing in the data; however, I also built in enough flexibility to the research process to allow for the exploration emerging of themes and unique student perspectives.

Research Question and Sub Questions

My interviews were focused on addressing the following broad research question:

What do students perceive to be the main impact of working while attending university?

As noted in Chapter two, researchers in this area have correlations between work and factors of the student experience. The existing literature provided a starting point and a framework for me to develop the following sub-questions designed to examine student experiences in these areas:

1. Academic Success: What perceptions do students have of the impact of working part-time on their academic experience (study time, concentration, GPA)?

2. Engagement: What effect does working while studying have on engaging with the on and off-campus community?
3. Skill Development: What non-academic benefits do students perceive they derive from working part-time, including competencies i.e. skills, knowledge and attitudes?

4. Health: What role does part-time work play in perceptions of physical and mental health?

The questions for the first interview were developed using these four sub-questions as a starting point. I piloted the initial questions on three students; input from the pilot interviews led to further refining of the question set.

**Research Methods**

Given my philosophical views and the current gap in the literature, I chose to approach the question of how part-time work impacts the student experience using a research methodology that aligns with the contemporary career development theorists mentioned in Chapter 2. Eisenhart and Howe (1992) state, “The data collection techniques employed should fit, or be suitable for answering the research question entertained” (p. 657). Participant interviews are the heart of many qualitative methodologies because, as Kvale and Brinkman (2009) so succinctly explain, “If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk to them?” (p. xvii). In order to learn more about how students experience the “impact” of work (as defined in the “Terminology” section of Chapter 2), I determined that I needed to have conversations directly with working students – I needed to “talk to them.” I selected one-on-one interviews as the primary method of data collection for my study, and I made use of this research method to gain a better understanding of the participants’ experiences. In so doing, I honoured the central purpose of this study outlined above, and created a strong fit between the research questions, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992).

In the next section, I anchor my concept of validity and trustworthiness in the literature, and describe techniques that I utilized to ensure a high degree of trustworthiness in data collection and analysis.
Validity

A major concern for qualitative researchers is conducting a study in a way that elicits trust from the readers. Eisenhart and Howe (1992) echo this by stating, “Validity - generally defined as the trustworthiness of inferences drawn from data - has always been a concern in educational research” (p. 644). My data collection phase included several features specifically intended to ensure a high degree of trustworthiness, which included creating a good interview partnership with participants, and member checking (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; Guba, 1981; Miles et al., 2013).

Weiss (1994) states, “Ultimately, our best guarantee of the validity of interview material is careful, concrete level, interviewing within the context of a good interviewing partnership” (p. 150). Interviewing draw on the specific strengths that I have developed throughout my practice as a counsellor. As a practicing Certified Canadian Counsellor (CCC), I feel at ease in such one-on-one, conversational encounters and therefore felt confident in my ability to build rapport with the participants, recognize and address emotions that may come to the surface during the interviews, actively listen to their stories, and draw forth their experiences (Weiss, 1994). Creating a good interviewing partnership with the participants was the first step I took to ensure validity of the interview material.

Guba (1981) describes member checking as “the single most important action inquirers can take, for it goes to the heart of the credibility criterion” (p. 85). I used member checking throughout the data collection phase to ensure that my interpretations of what the participants were saying were continuously tested with the participants themselves. An example of the way that I used member checking is apparent in my interviews with Vanessa. When I reviewed the transcript from Vanessa’s first interview, I noticed that she had used very specific words to describe how she felt about her job. In the final interview, I conducted a reliability check by sharing the data with her to give her a chance to react to what she had said and to elaborate, if necessary. Here is a part of our conversation:

Howie: In the transcript, you used the words like, ‘mundane’, ‘day-to-day’. The job wasn’t something that you could really see yourself doing, but it was something that you could fit into your life as a student. So I wanted to ask you about what’s keeping you in your job if it’s not the role that you want to do. It’s mundane and in some cases, it’s not motivating.
Vanessa: I think there’re two really strong factors that lead to me staying with the organization. One of course is the pay. I mentioned before the company pays a living wage. So for the hours that I’m working I’m actually getting a really good return, that you know factors into exchange and going to school and everything else. Uh, the other factor is that I don’t have to take anything home with me.

Checking in with Vanessa about her use of the terms ‘mundane’ and ‘day-to-day’ resulted in an opportunity for her to elaborate on how she used both terms, leading to a stronger, and richer understanding of her experience by me. In this case, member checking added another layer to her story by exposing two factors that were important to her in balancing work and academic commitments, and serves to illustrate how the technique lead to a more complete data set from which I drew inferences during analysis (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; Guba, 1981; Miles et al., 2013).

I utilized additional techniques and strategies during the data collection and analysis phases to strengthen inferences made from the data. These included use of early and on-going data analysis and memo writing (desc, and strategies to organize the data using sketches and diagrams, and a meta-matrix; I will describe these techniques in the data collection and analysis sections.

**Research Context and Participants**

This study took place within the business faculty at Simon Fraser University (SFU), a multi-campus comprehensive university with total enrollment in excess of 35,000 students. The Faculty of Business Administration at SFU, also known as the Beedie School of Business (or Beedie), consists of approximately 3600 undergraduate Bachelor of Business Administration students spread out over three campuses. I selected SFU because I had worked in student services at SFU for six years, and had lasting connections to the university. Although no longer an employee of SFU, I was confident that not only the institution, but also my personal and professional connections with staff and faculty would assist with completing a research project of this nature.

Of all of the undergraduate programs at SFU, I chose to work with the employed undergraduate students from Beedie. Specifically, I targeted Beedie students who had completed between 30 and 60 credits, were enrolled full-time, and who were working part-
time. At SFU, most undergraduate courses are assigned three or four credits, with 30
credits typically being completed per academic year. A four-year general degree program
at SFU requires students to complete 120 units. For the purpose of this research project,
the terms ‘credit’ and ‘credit hour’ were used instead of ‘unit’.

The Participants

Students participating in this study were all full-time undergraduate business
students from Simon Fraser University’s Beedie School of Business working part-time.
Participants ranged in age from 19 to 23 and included 5 males and 11 females; most lived
at home with their parents. All of the students were in good academic standing with their
grade point averages (GPAs) ranging from 2.5 to 3.6. Table 1 provides an overview of this
demographic information, including participant pseudonyms.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Credits Completed</th>
<th>Credits Enrolled</th>
<th>Lives with Parents</th>
<th>International Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I chose business students as the population for this study because of the emphasis business schools place on work experience, the support the students are given through their exclusive business career centres and the mandatory career preparation program. As a result of these services and pressures, I expected to have richer conversations with business students about how working was impacting their experience, compared with other students. Roulin and Bangerter (2013), in their qualitative study looking into the impact of extra-curricular activities for positional advantage in competitive job markets, also selected business students as a population to engage with because of the competitive post-graduation job market “exerting more pressure on such students to elaborate discourses of employability” (p.27).

More so than most other undergraduate students on campus, business students have a reputation as students who are very connected to life after graduation, and to what industry expects of them post-graduation. They are repeatedly told by faculty, staff, and senior students of the importance of networking and gaining relevant experience to ensure success after graduation. The majority of the participants in the study commented that their professors and advisers had at some point encouraged them to network, attend events on campus, and be active as Beedie students. For example, when exploring this with Betty, she shared that,

...employers like to see that people are not just studying, hanging out and partying. So I feel like it shows responsibility, as well taking on the volunteer role, I want people when I apply for co-op, and actually careers, I want them to see that I have been doing something for the last couple of years, and not just having an excellent GPA. I feel like everyone is good in school...

In addition to this heightened awareness of what employers are looking for in graduates, Beedie students are the only group of undergraduate students at the SFU campus who have their own dedicated career centre. The Beedie Career Management Centre, was established to “Empower business students and alumni with skills for career success, create lasting stakeholder relationships with business students, alumni, faculty, and the business community, and be recognized as career development experts”( SFU
Career Management Centre, n.d.). Beedie students are made aware of the need to focus on their post-graduation marketability from an early stage, and are required to participate in the Business Career Passport program, designed to teach business students to choose a concentration, identify opportunities in the business community, develop a professional network, and seek employment opportunities in a planned and prepared manner. This is a relatively new program at Beedie, and students admitted before fall 2012 are not required to participate for graduation, but may participate in Passport if they choose. As a result, the majority of participants of this study were not required to participate in the Business Career Passport program.

30-60 Credits: Adapting to a New Environment

I included 30-60 credits as a selection criteria because attrition in first and second year is highest; within two years of admission to SFU, 29% of students across all faculties were placed on academic probation, with 11% being required to withdraw (Heslop & Tilley, 2007). Students in their first few years at university, with credit completion levels between 30-60, are developing and putting into place habits and patterns that will allow them to survive in a new environment; work may play a role in affecting students in their first few years (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella, 1998). I was most interested in connecting with these students to learn how they were adapting to the added stress of working while studying, the strategies they had put into place to help them cope, and their overall experiences as working students.

During the course of the study it became evident that participant recruitment may be difficult, so I expanded credit eligibility. In some cases, participants indicated that they met the requirements, but during the interview disclosed that they had completed more than 60 credits. Specifically, 10 of the 16 students included in the study had completed between 30 and 60 credits, with the other six students being either over or under the required credits. Two students had not completed the required credits for the study at SFU, but had accumulated enough transfer credits to qualify them for the study. Four students had accumulated more than 60 credits, with one having completed 87 credits. Variation was also noticeable in participant’s enrollment status, with most students being enrolled in at least 9 credits. During the summer, a few of the participants were enrolled in fewer
courses so that they could work more. I was hoping to include participants who fell within the 30-60 credit range, but in the interest of obtaining a broad sample of experience, I was willing to be flexible. Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2013) warn of the dangers of having too narrow a sample, and suggest that including participants that are on the periphery of the phenomenon may result in a stronger understanding of the issues at hand.

In summary, Beedie students may be in a better position to comment on how work is affecting them because they are made more aware than other students of the importance of being involved and acquiring marketable skills and experiences. Evidence from the interviews support that Beedie students are exposed to multiple stimuli driving them to be aware of the experiences they are participating in, and the overall impact of these experiences on their post-graduation marketability; they are programmed at an early stage to be aware of how they are making themselves more attractive to the business community post-graduation.

**Timing of the Interviews**

I conducted interviews over 11 months, and distributed participants in blocks of five or six. There were five participants in each of the first two blocks, and six in the third block. After conducting first interviews with the first block of participants, I met with my senior supervisor to discuss emerging themes, verify coding strategies, and generally update him on the research. Then, I conducted the second interview with each of the participants in the block. Before moving on to recruit the next block of participants, I adjusted the interview protocol to account for new themes that had arisen from the interviews.

The average time between the first and second interview with the first block was approximately 15 weeks. This time was reduced to eight weeks for the second block of five participants, and further reduced to six weeks for the final block of six participants. Over the course of the study I became more skilled and efficient in recruiting students and securing transcripts, which resulted in reduced time between first and second interviews. What impact did this have on the research project? The reduction in time between the two interviews may have resulted in more accurate results with the second and third blocks of
students, as participants may have been more likely to remember what they said in the first interview, and be able to confirm with more certainty that my notes were accurate. Although this was not confirmed in the data, I intentionally interviewed additional students to ensure that the sample was large enough to account for this potential limitation.

**Participant Recruitment**

Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2013) state that sampling for qualitative studies, “tends to be more strategic and purposive because we are focusing on a case's unique context” (p. 32). As outlined above, I established eligibility requirements for participants in a strategic manner so that eligible students would be well suited to describe thephenomenon I was exploring. Once I had established the eligibility requirements, I set about to recruit participants. As indicated, one of the reasons I chose SFU and Beedie as a site was because of my personal and professional ties with the school. Because of the school’s interest in my research and my professional ties to the Beedie School of Business, the school embraced my research and provided an open and supportive environment for me to recruit students and collect data.

In order to determine the best way to get access to eligible students, I conducted a series of meetings with senior Beedie administrators and staff. Based on these meetings, I partnered with four departments within Beedie, including the Co-operative Education Office, Career Management Centre (CMC), Student Engagement Office, and Academic Advising Office, who were best positioned to refer participants. Next, I created content for recruitment emails (see Appendix B – recruitment email and poster content) which was then sent from these departments at the beginning of three consecutive semesters. Over the course of the year, the Beedie Cooperative Education Department sent the email to approximately 1700 students who were registered or participating in the cooperative education program. On numerous occasions over the year, the CMC sent the recruitment content to approximately 3800 students and alumni, often as part of a ‘Weekly Opportunities’ email. The CMC also utilized its LinkedIn group, with membership of 2600 students and alumni to promote the study. In addition, a poster was placed in a busy hallway frequented by business students at the beginning of the three semesters. The Beedie Student Engagement and Academic Advising Offices also played key roles in
participant recruitment, by mentioning the study to many students during individual advising appointments and events. I regularly reached out to staff members within the four departments to remind them of the study, update them on my progress, and thank them for their on-going support. When I was on campus conducting interviews, I made a point of dropping by and visiting Beedie staff who were actively recruiting for the study. To make the study more appealing to students, I provided an incentive of 25 dollars in the form of a gift card to the book store. Most of the students who responded to the invitation heard about the study from either the CMC, or the Cooperative Education program; in one case, a participant found out about the study from a friend.

In summary, students received the information about the study from multiple sources, which included email, word of mouth from staff and students, LinkedIn, and posters. Approximately 40 students responded to the invitation to participate, with 16 meeting the study eligibility requirements as described above.

Ethical Considerations

This study would not have been possible without the participants listed above; the following section outlines the ethical considerations and care taken to protect them. This study was categorized as minimal risk and undertaken with the approval by the Office of Research Ethics (ORE) at Simon Fraser University on behalf of the Research Ethics Board in accordance with University Policy R20.01 (http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/research/r20-01.html). Approval was obtained by complying with the ORE’s principles of research involving human subjects. The following documents were approved by the ORE:

- Recruitment Email and Recruitment Poster - Appendix B
- Research Questions and Interview Protocol - Appendix C
- Transcriptionist Consent Form - Appendix D
- Participant Consent Form - Appendix E
As part of the approval process, the Beedie School of Business agreed to support the research by granting access to student contact information, assisting in the recruitment of participants through email and posters, and providing access to space to interview participants on campus; a signed letter was obtained outlining these conditions.

In accordance with University Policy R20.01, the study was explained to each participant at the beginning of the interview (see Appendix E – Participant Consent Form), and a signature was obtained from the participant indicating his/her informed consent to participate in the research project. Participants were initially assigned a pseudonym, P1, P2, P3, etc., during the interview; at no point were their names recorded on the audio file. Paper copies of the informed consent listing their pseudonyms, which was the only hard copy linking participant name to pseudonym, were stored in a locked safe at my home. I assigned each of the participants a second pseudonym, (see Table 1) once all of the interviews had been conducted and transcribed. This was a study looking into participant experiences, and I felt that naming each student, rather than using P1, P2, P3, etc., honoured their willingness to participate, and allowed me to get to know them, and remember them, more effectively.

Only one electronic file served as the key linking a participant name to his/her pseudonym; this was stored on a password-protected laptop. Interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim; 13 of the 16 audio files were transcribed by either myself or the primary transcriptionist, with two secondary transcriptionists being used during peak times. All transcriptionists were provided an overview of the research project, given a sample transcript to orient them, and provided a quick tutorial on how to transcribe using McLellan, MacQueen and Neidig’s (2003) guidelines on data preparation and transcription. All transcripts were double-checked by me; each interview was listened to and cross-referenced against the transcript to insure accuracy. All the transcriptionists signed a consent form committing to protecting the identity of the individuals (see Appendix D); at no point did the transcriptionists have access to the participant’s name.

As mentioned above, this study would not have been possible without the participants. I made a concerted effort to thank the participants at the end of each interview for sharing their stories with me, and donating time out of their extremely busy schedules.
In addition to thanking each participant, a $25 gift card was provided at the beginning of the first interview. My sense from the participants was that they were very willing to sacrifice two hours of their time to assist in this research. Evidence of this willingness was demonstrated by their almost perfect attendance; except on only two of 35 occasions, all of the participants arrived on time, and all participants completed the second interview.

**Data Collection**

I designed the data collection process to include three distinct stages to ensure that I captured the richness of the participants’ experiences in a comprehensive manner. In other words, I wanted the process to provide enough consistency so that I asked all of the participants the same questions in the first interview, and more importantly, to build in enough flexibility so that the participants could tell their stories in the way they chose. I knew that in most cases I would only have two hours with them, and wanted to maximize the opportunity to hear what it was like for them to balance their academic and work commitments. I recorded (audio) and transcribed all interviews so that I had a detailed account of the interview with each participant.

**Stage One**

Stage one consisted of collecting census information about the participant and the nature of their part-time job (Table 2).

**Table 2. Interview Census Questions and Nature of Employment**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Credits completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Credits currently enrolled in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>How many jobs are you currently working?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Hours worked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Job title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Name of Employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Compensation: How much are you paid per hour?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Is your job related to your field of study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>How long have you worked there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Location of employment?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. Place of residence (where do you live?):___________________
14. Do you live with your parents?:_________
15. Primary mode of transportation (bus, car, bike):______________
16. How long (minutes) does it take you to commute (one way) from:
   a. Home to work? ______________
   b. Home to school? ______________
   c. School to work? ______________

I included these questions to provide a more complete picture of the participants, and supplement the interview data with factors that are commonly reported on in other studies concerning working students. In addition, I added “compensation” and “commute” as two factors that I was curious about exploring with the student participants.

I piloted the interview process on three students selected from the target population to solidify the purpose of the study and determine if the interview protocol and question set represented an appropriate starting point. I conducted interviews at both the Harbour Centre and Burnaby Mountain Campuses, and when no other on-campus option was available, at my downtown office. During the course of the pilot, participants played an active role in determining if the questions were easy to understand, and if the number of questions asked was appropriate for a one hour interview. Piloting the questions also helped me to identify potentially redundant questions, and uncover any themes that were overlooked in drafting the questions. For example, during the pilot interviews it became apparent that parents could play an active role in the phenomenon, so I adjusted the question set to include this topic for all subsequent interviews. For the three students participating in the pilot, and the first five participant interviews, I posed the questions listed in Table 2 verbally at the beginning of the interview before transitioning into the other questions. However, after reviewing the transcripts, I discovered that beginning the interview process with short questions about gender, age, and hours worked was resulting in participants becoming conditioned to this pattern of responses, and subsequently, providing very brief responses to subsequent questions. In addition, for the first five participant interviews I used a laptop to enter notes, which also may have resulted in shorter than expected participant responses; this may have been due to participants being
distracted by the sounds of my key strokes, or my focus not being on them. My process was negatively impacting the participant experience by creating barriers for them to share their stories and an adjustment was needed.

I adjusted the interview process to create better dialogue and flow by making three changes to the interview protocol (Weiss, 1994). First, the census and workplace information about the student and the nature of the part-time job (Table 2) was collected through a short one page survey prior to starting the first interview, eliminating questions at the beginning of the interview. Second, once the participants had completed the survey and were ready to begin the interview, I asked the intentionally broad question, “Tell me how you ended up at Simon Fraser University”. The purpose of this question was to get the participants talking about something that was familiar to them and put them at ease with me. Finally, during the interview I put my laptop away, and instead focused my attention on the participant and the questions being asked. I wrote analytical memos at the end of each interview, and added to them as I reviewed each transcript. I found that these changes made a substantial impact in putting the participants at ease during the interview which had a direct impact on the length and richness of responses.

**Stage Two**

During stage two, I interviewed the participants for an hour using questions contained in the interview protocol (see Appendix C) and often probed and explored emerging content with the participants, depending on their responses.

A-priori categories from the literature formed the basis of the questions, which I divided into six sections. I constructed the first section to encourage participants to talk about their work environments, supervisors, workplace flexibility and sense of belonging with the company (Table 3). I wanted to encourage the participants from the beginning of the interview, to describe their work environments in as much detail as possible, setting the stage for further exploration of not only the work, but also the impact of work on other factors in their life. This was a chance for me to explore how the students felt at work, and highlight elements of their job that they felt were important.
I included flexibility and the participant’s relationship with his/her supervisor as areas to explore to get a sense of factors that may or may not contribute in a meaningful way to the student's experience. Was it important to students that they had a positive relationship with their supervisor? How did the overall flexibility of the job contribute to the student’s experience and the on-going struggle to balance academic and work schedules?

Table 3. Participant Interview Questions – Section One

1. Tell me how you ended up at SFU?
2. Tell me a bit more about what you do at work?
3. What is your supervisor like?
4. Supportive, directive, involved?
5. Physical environment and overall work environment?
6. Pace – fast, slow?
7. Co-workers?
8. Fitting in? Sense of belonging?
9. Is your role related to your area of study and your career aspirations?
10. Tell me about your career aspirations...what do you want to be when you grow up?
11. How would you describe your current job in terms of flexibility?
12. How flexible is your current work schedule?

During the second section of the interview (Table 4), I explored their experiences as working students to find out more about what was it was like for them to work while studying. I also explored their past employment experiences as a way to determine how new the experience of working was for the participant. I also explored reasons for working to better understand what was driving the decision to work, was it to pay for tuition or gain experience that would make the student more marketable post-graduation? Finally, I asked questions about balancing the demands of school and work, and specific coping strategies that participants had developed.

Table 4. Participant Interview Questions – Section Two

1. How did you find your current job?
2. What are your reasons for working?
3. What's it like to work while studying full-time?
4. Have you always worked while studying at SFU? At what point did you begin to work while studying full-time?
5. How do you balance the demands of school and work?
6. What are your coping strategies?
7. What have you found to be difficult?
8. What have you found to be easy about working while studying?
9. What are three qualities that allow you to balance work with school?

In the third section (Table 5), I explored how working was impacting the participant's academic success. Adding to the coping strategies explored in section two, I also inquired into the techniques being utilized to maintain academic standings. I also wanted to find out if students were skipping academically relevant activities in order to work, as this would help to better understand the student’s priorities.

Table 5. Participant Interview Questions – Section Three

1. How are you doing academically in your program?
2. What do you estimate your GPA to be?
3. How is working while studying affecting your academic progress?
4. What changes, if any, have you noticed to your GPA since you came to SFU – how has work affected your GPA?
5. What techniques are you utilizing (or not utilizing) to maintain your academic standing?
6. How often do you skip classes or cut academically relevant activities because of work?

In the fourth section of the interview (Table 6), I invited participants to talk about their engagement with the on and off-campus community to see if working played a role in community engagement. A growing body of literature suggests that students who are more engaged with the campus community and academically meaningful activities will be more successful (Carini et al., 2006; Kuh, 1991; Kuh, 2007a; Pike et al., 2008; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). If students were working off-campus, how did this impact their ability to spend time on-campus participating in clubs, studying in the library, and or spending time with friends?

Table 6. Participant Interview Questions – Section Four

1. How important is it to you to engage with the campus community?
2. What kind of extra-curricular activities are you participating in:
   3. On campus?
   4. Off-campus?
3. How do you spend your free time:
   4. On campus?
   5. Off campus?
4. If you had a free Sunday (no work/school), what would you do?
5. How often do you get this kind of free time?
6. How is working while studying affecting your ability to engage with the campus community?
In the fifth section (Table 7), I sought to understand how working contributed to the development of skills, abilities and aptitudes, and how learning at work compared to learning in the classroom. Did participants feel that they were learning things on the job that they weren’t learning in the classroom? If so, were they learning things that were making them stronger students?

Table 7. Participant Interview Questions – Section Five

1. What non-academic benefits do you perceive to derive from working part-time (competencies – skills, knowledge attitudes)?
2. How is working while studying impacting the development of useful skills, knowledge and attitudes?
3. Are you learning things on the job that you aren’t in your classes?
4. Are you learning things on the job that are making you a stronger student?
5. How will your work experience be a benefit to you? To your career?

In the sixth section (Table 8), I asked questions relating to the participant’s job and their perception of their physical and mental health. With the potential for less unstructured time than non-working students, were working students behaving in a way that impacted their health? Was workplace stress a factor for students? If so, how was it affecting their appetite, sleep patterns, and stress levels?

Table 8. Participant Interview Questions – Section Six

1. How are you finding balancing working/studying and staying physically fit? How would you characterize your physical health (fitness, eating habits)?
2. How about your mental health including (stress levels, getting enough sleep)? How would you describe your overall mental health?
3. Have you noticed changes since you started working, if so, what do you attribute those changes to?

The final section (Table 9) provided me an opportunity to end the interview by having the participants comment on the role parents and significant others play in their lives. Were parents and significant others encouraging, or discouraging their children to work while studying? Students were also asked to provide advice to new Beedie students on working part-time. From the student perspective, should new Beedie students work, and if so, what was the ideal work environment for them?

Table 9. Participant Interview Questions – Section Seven

1. Role of parents in working/studying?
2. Role of significant other in working/studying?
3. What advice would you give to those just starting their studies and planning to work?

4. Ideal work environment – what should students considering to work while studying look for in a new job?

**Stage Three**

Stage three of the data collection process consisted of the second and final interview with each participant. I created the question set for the second interview as I analyzed the transcript from the first interview. The second interview allowed me to further explore topics mentioned in the first interview that were not discussed in enough detail. For example, in some instances, I missed opportunities to explore potentially rich topics during the interview process. Weiss (1994) refers to these as “markers”, and defines them as “…a passing reference made by a respondent to an important event or feeling state” (p.77).

Tina: Uh like there are days like you know you just get mad. But I know I have to work there because I need the job for my studies.

Howie: You need the job.

Tina: For my studies.

Howie: Right. Okay, so that’s great. So we’re going to move on to the second section here. So how did you find your job?

This section of the transcript illustrates me missing an opportunity to explore a marker pertaining to underlying anger associated with working, or the connection between working and Tina’s studies (Weiss, 1994). In situations like these, I was able to use the second interview as a chance to explore areas that I had missed, or over-looked in the first interview. The second interview also gave me an opportunity to check in about my interpretations from the first interview, and share broader themes emerging from other participant interviews.

**Data Analysis**

In my study, data analysis was a fluid, early and on-going process that began after the first interview. I wrote analytic memos at the end of each interview to capture my
immediate thoughts and feelings about the interview and about the content that the participants had shared. Once I had listened to the audio file and reviewed the transcript, I would sometimes add additional thoughts to my original memo. Furthermore, I sometimes adjusted the interview protocol in order to bring future interviews in line with the emerging themes. Allowing already collected data to shape ongoing research in this way is recommended by scholars such as Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013), who write that this process “helps the field worker cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data” (p. 70). As previously noted, throughout my study, I made several major changes to the strategies I used to collect data, including adjusting the focus of my questions and the way the interviews were structured. These changes were made as a direct result of what I was hearing in the interviews I had already conducted. For example, in Fran’s first interview she talked about her partner and how he supported her in balancing work and school, yet the previous seven participants had not mentioned their partners. In order to explore this theme more completely in future interviews, I added a question about the role partners played in balancing school and work commitments. I also reviewed transcripts from previous interviews to ensure that none of the other participants had made reference to their partners.

Rather than having completely separate “data collection” and “data analysis” phases of my research, I analyzed data from the interviews throughout the entirety of my research process. Not only did this approach allow for emergent themes to inform my ongoing data collection (as described above), but it also allowed my analysis to include both quick initial passes using audio files and transcripts and more in-depth, structured coding and interpretation of interview themes. My review of each participants’ first interview was focused on reviewing the transcript in detail, and on creating follow-up questions for the second interviews. When the second interviews had been transcribed, I created a master transcript for each participant by combining the text of the first and second interviews into one file; these “master transcripts” ranged from 39 to 106 pages in length. Figure 1 outlines the data analysis process, beginning with the data (verbatim transcripts and analytic memos), and ending with a model describing the impact of part-time work on the student experience.
Coding and Sorting

My original intention was to use the software package NVivo 10 to manage the coding process. However, I chose not to make use of NVivo 10, as I found the software to be slow and better suited to research using multiple sources of media. In addition, it was evident to me that my process would be influenced, and potentially confined, by the features of the software. Thus I chose not make use of the NVivo software as I did not want a research tool to indirectly guide the direction of my analysis (Weiss, 1994). My coding process was more rudimentary than what NVivo would have afforded me, as it enabled me to organize, quickly locate, and work with coded material from my interview transcripts; my coding process involved using the Microsoft Word’s “comment” function to label text with appropriate descriptive codes.

When coding the data, I needed to stay organized in order to thoroughly review over 1,000 pages of interview transcripts. To achieve this level of organization, I made use of the four stages of coding outlined by Weiss (1994): coding, sorting, local integration, and inclusive integration. When considering the creation of codes, Weiss (1994) shares
that “Some coding categories we bring to our studies before ever knowing what the interviews will produce” (p.155). In my study, a-priori categories from the literature guided not only the creation of my interview protocol, but also my initial codes (Miles et al., 2013; Weiss, 1994; Winkler, 2009). Thus, I created a variety of codes to account for four factors that have been associated with “student success”, including GPA, health, skill development, and engagement with the on- and off-campus communities (Astin, 1993; Colbeck et al., 2003; Kuh & Schneider, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1998, 2000). My codes were descriptive, and used to “assign labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase - most often a noun –the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Miles et al., 2013, p. 74). For example, I created descriptive codes for “Work and Physical Health” and “Work and Mental Health,” which I assigned to appropriate segments, or excerpts of the transcripts: I present a comprehensive list of codes in Appendix F. These excerpts of data were then cut and pasted into individual files, what Weiss (1994) refers to as “excerpt files”; each descriptive code had a corresponding excerpt file. I applied descriptive codes to the data with the goal of creating “an inventory of topics for indexing and categorizing” (p. 74). As the coding process progressed, I organized and categorized the data based on descriptive codes. In this way, I was able to cluster similar content together in excerpt files, thus setting the stage for further analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Miles et al., 2013; Weiss, 1994).

However, I did not create all of my codes before data collection began. I also made use of inductive codes to account for themes that emerged from the participant interviews that I had not anticipated (Appendix F). Thus, if none of the deductive codes described the “basic topic of the passage” I was reviewing, I then created an new inductive code to do so (Miles et al., 2013, p. 74). My process for creating a code consisted of three steps. First, I created a new inductive code to describe the passage by selecting a label to describe the data. Second, I analyzed each interview transcript looking for this theme and then cut and pasted relevant text from the transcripts into the new excerpt file. To track this process, I created an audit trail to document the creation of new codes, and also to ensure that I returned to previously analyzed transcripts to examine them for the new code. To review for codes, I used key word searches and re-read relevant sections of the transcript. Third, I updated the interview protocol with a new question related to the emergent theme, a step which ensured that all subsequent participants had the chance to
comment on the topic. In some cases, a new code was created between a participant’s first and second interview. If this occurred, I presented the new theme(s) to the participant in the second interview and invited comment. For example, in my first interview with Betty, she mentioned her boyfriend and how working sometimes made it difficult for her to spend time with him. This was the first time that any of the participants had mentioned a significant other, and it prompted me to add a question about significant others in future interviews. Over the course of the project, I applied 37 descriptive codes, with 32 originating from a-priori categories in the literature (deductive), and five originating from the interviews (inductive) (Miles et al., 2013; Weiss, 1994; Winkler, 2009).

**Local Integration**

As excerpt files grew in size, I began the process of local integration, which Weiss (1994) describes simply as “summarizing the excerpt file and its codings: Here is what is said in this area, and this is what I believe it to mean” (p. 154). Once I had coded all of the data and sorted it into excerpt files, I read each file line-by-line. I organized excerpt files by participant and by interview, so I was able to tie each line of data to a participant and to either the first, more structured, or the second, more free-flowing, interview. I read each file and highlighted the quotations that I believed most accurately conveyed the meaning of the code or research theme. In order to represent each theme as accurately as possible, I highlighted a broad range of quotations. For example, participants described their supervisors in a variety of ways: some used words like “micro-manager” and “creepy”, while others used words like “supportive” and “understanding” – all of these descriptors were highlighted and ultimately contributed to my understanding of the participants’ relationships with their supervisors, as outlined in chapter 4, under the heading “Supervisor”.

In addition, to assist me in staying close to the data, I created a “meta-matrix” which “…arranges data for easy viewing in one place, permits detailed analysis, and sets the stage for later cross-case analysis” (Miles et al., 2013, p. 111). Using the meta-matrix, which I built using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, I was able to quickly see the primary reasons participants worked, compare commute times, and contrast how working was impacting the participants’ GPA, skill development, health, etc. I continually added content to the meta-matrix, which grew over the course of the study and came to represent a
summary of combined demographic data, participant quotations, and research notes, all of which helped me to clarify the central themes of the study. The meta-matrix contained precise summaries of the participants’ experiences, which provided context for my interpretations and allowed overarching themes to emerge from across the interviews. Each column of the meta-matrix represented a participant, with each row containing data unique to him/her. The meta-matrix was structured so that demographic data was displayed near the top and included age, gender, and commute times to and from work, etc. Below this, I added data related to major themes of the study, with each cell containing my notes, and direct quotes from the participant to keep me connected to the participant’s unique experience. Not only did the meta-matrix assist with cross-case comparisons, but it also helped me to stay close to the participants, as the summaries contained participant quotes from verbatim transcripts.

I also relied on counting as a research technique, which allows researchers to “(1) to see rapidly what you have in large batches of data, (2) to verify a hunch or hypothesis, and (3) to keep yourself analytically honest, protecting against bias” (Miles et al., 2013, p.282). Where appropriate, I counted to better understand the impact of work on the student experience. For example, when looking at the participants’ physical and mental health, I analyzed each excerpt file and counted the number of participants who felt that work was a barrier to healthy living. This information was then added to the meta-matrix as the last column, allowing me to quickly see the impact of working on one aspect of the participants’ experiences. In these ways, I used the excerpt file, containing direct quotations from participants, and the meta-matrix, containing numerical summaries, to organize, or locally integrate the stories the participants had shared (Miles et al., 2013; Weiss, 1994).

**Inclusive Integration: Forming Interpretations**

With the summarizing of excerpt files relatively complete, the final step for me was to inclusively integrate the data “…into a single coherent story” (Weiss, 1994, p.160). In this section I describe the process I followed, and the techniques that I used, first to bring forth the major themes from the data, and second to build a model which became the “single coherent story” that illustrates the connections between the themes and visually describes the impact of the part-time work on the student experience.
The first step was grouping the descriptive codes into categories – what Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) refer to as “pattern codes” – to assist me in developing initial frameworks and theories outlining the participants’ experiences. In order to accomplish this goal, each pattern code was assigned a label that gave meaning to the group of descriptive codes that it represented. To accomplish this task, I created laminated cards of all the descriptive codes, which allowed me to spread them out on a flat surface, arranging and re-arranging them in different configurations to make meaning of the relationships and connections between them (Becker, 2010; Miles et al., 2013; Weiss, 1994). For example, as noted in Table 10, the pattern code “Work Environment” was used to organize all of the descriptive codes associated with the participants’ places of work, including “Supervisor,” “Flexibility,” “Co-workers,” “Co-workers – sense of belonging,” “Working on-campus,” “Compensation,” “Commute,” and “Experience of working while studying.” Next, I continued to move and manipulate the descriptive codes into pattern codes while referring to the meta-matrix (Miles et al., 2013).

As can be seen in Table 10, in some cases I used descriptive codes to reinforce more than one pattern code. For example, I used “Flexibility” for both “Time: The Collision of Work and School” and “Work Environment.”

### Table 10: Pattern Codes and Associated Descriptive Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern Codes (themes)</th>
<th>Descriptive Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work Environment</td>
<td>Supervisor, Flexibility, Co-workers, Co-workers – sense of belonging, Working on campus, Compensation, and Experience of working while studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time: The Collision of Work and School</td>
<td>Difficulty balancing work with School, Drawbacks to working, Free Sunday, Flexibility, Commute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working and Academics: Learning to Survive</td>
<td>Strategies to maintain academic standing, Benefits to working, Drawbacks to working, Skill development , Non-academic benefits - work making a stronger student, Work benefiting career, Three traits, Qualities needed to balance work with school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Success</td>
<td>Interference with (influence on) academic progress, Interference with (influence on) academic progress - courses, Difficulty balancing work with school, Easy balancing work with school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Work and physical health, Work and mental health, and Academics and health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, I relied on what Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) refer to as making “contrast/comparisons,” and frequently bounced between the raw data contained in excerpt files, and the meta-matrix to determine how the participants’ experiences compared and contrasted with one another. Finally, through numerous iterations of the descriptive model over a 12-month period of intense data analysis and interpretation, changes to the make-up of the pattern codes became less and less frequent, which suggested that the primary themes of the study as represented by the pattern codes were plausible and supported by the data (Miles et al., 2013).

Once I established the pattern codes, I used a similarly iterative process to arrange them into a visual model that described the experience of the working students in the study. To create this visual model, I physically manipulated the pattern codes, sketched and wrote analytic memos, and cross-referenced the meta-matrix. The resultant visual model forms the backbone of the findings chapter and is presented in chapter 4.

A code book (Appendix G) has been included for researchers seeking to replicate this study. I included five elements for each pattern code, including an appropriate name, a clear definition of the theme, a description of how to identify the theme, and samples of data that were either included or excluded in the theme (Boyatzis, 1998).

**Summary: Data Analysis and Trustworthiness**

In summary, as described above, there were a number of steps I took to ensure a high degree of trustworthiness in the inferences I drew from the data during the data collection and data phases. During data collection, I created good interview partnerships with participants, and used member checking in the second interview to ensure my interpretations of the participants’ experiences were tested with the participants.
themselves (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; Guba, 1981; Miles et al., 2013). During the data analysis phase, I used techniques such as early and on-going data analysis and memo writing, and strategies to organize the unfolding themes, which included physically manipulating the data, and using a meta-matrix. All of these techniques assisted in formulating theories and testing the plausibility of my inferences from the data (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; Miles et al., 2013; Weiss, 1994).

**Limitations**

Despite the efforts that researchers make to align their study designs with the best practices of qualitative research, all studies necessarily have their limitations (Charmaz, 2014; Miles et al., 2013; Patton, 1990; Weiss, 1994). In this section, I will outline some of the limitations that I have identified in the present study.

First, applying the parameters outlined above (i.e., enrolled in 30-60 credit hours, full-time status, working part-time, business students, etc.) to the selection of my participants meant that I only interviewed a very narrow subset of the student population. The results of this study may therefore not be generalizable to other populations of working students. While this lack of generalizability is certainly a limitation, it is also worth reiterating that I intentionally designed this study to take a deeper look at the idiosyncratic experiences of working students, and the contexts in which these experiences occurred. I, therefore, purposely selected participants that would be able to deepen my understanding of the impact of part-time work on their experiences, rather than aiming to make determinations about students’ work/study which could be applied across broad populations.

Second, this study is limited in that important perspectives may be still missing from the model (Chapter 4, Figure 2). For example, the students participating in this study were all in good academic standing (GPA>2.0). The resulting lack of content and perspective from students in poor academic standing may limit the robustness of the model. Perspectives from students outside of the School of Business, students who are enrolled as part-time, etc. are also left out of the present study. These missing perspectives may provide a direction for future research to be conducted in this area.
Finally, the highly contextual nature of this study (geographic location, time of year, characteristics of participants) may impose limitations on the findings. For example, students working during different times of the year may or may not have experiences that differ from those shared by the participants in this study.

It is hoped that the findings from this study may generate sufficient interest in the topic that complementary methods of research may be used to extend the knowledge base in this area.
Chapter 4. Results

Introduction

In this chapter, I share the stories of sixteen full-time students in the Beedie School of Business who are working part-time. These stories stem from the two rounds of interviews I conducted for this study, and have been organized into major themes. In some cases, I use participant profiles at the beginning of a section to provide an example of the theme being discussed. I also include sample exemplary quotations from the interview transcripts as a way of sharing participants’ experiences, presenting themes that emerged from the interviews, but also highlighting the range of experiences and the context in which they occurred. Additionally, I make use of a descriptive model (Figure 2), which serves to visually represent the participant’s stories and experiences and acts as a roadmap for the following chapter.

A Descriptive Model of the Impact of Part-Time Work on the Student Experience

As stated above, the descriptive model is a result of an iterative process involving descriptive coding, and then subsequent categorizing, organizing, and eventually clustering of the coded data together to describe various themes of the participant experiences (Miles et al., 2013; Weiss, 1994). The result of this process, outlined in more detail above, is what Weiss (1994) refers to as a “single coherent story”, visually representing the major themes explored during the course of this study (p. 160).
The primary purpose of this study was to better understand the experience of working students, beginning with why students work in the first place. Figure 1 presents the constellation of data that informs this study, as described by both the scholarly literature and my interviews with participants. Bearing in mind the participants’ rationales for working, I developed interview questions that helped to focus on the actual experience of working while studying, including the impacts that part-time work had on these participants’ competencies, including skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Some of these impacts were found to be more immediate and were directly influenced by the collision of work and academics, while others were found to be more long-term. Such long-term impacts included the effect of working on academic success, health, engagement, and post-graduation employability. In addition to commenting on the kinds of impacts they experienced by working part-time while studying, the participants often commented on the support they received from the people around them; consideration of the supporting role that can be played by parents, university staff and faculty, employers, and co-workers is therefore also presented in this chapter. However, the issues and opportunities related to
external support will be addressed in more detail in chapter 5, as an area for future research.

The Descriptive Model of the Impact of Part-Time Work on the Student Experience makes use of uni- and bi-directional arrows to account for the dynamism in the students' experiences and more clearly describe the fluidity of the connections between the components contained within the model. For example, in the time between our first and second interviews, several of the participants experienced shifts in either their places of employment or their rationales for working part-time, or sometimes in both. Such shifts reveal that students' experiences with part-time work are fluid and dynamic. Uni-directional arrows in the model are used to describe a one-way relationship between components. An example of such a one-way relationship is the competencies in time management and scheduling that the participants developed in response to the time pressures that they experienced from the collision of their part-time work and their academics. Uni-directional arrows are also used to connect the broader/longer-term impacts of part-time work to the participants' reasons for working. These arrows demonstrate that the participants often made adjustments to how much they worked, or where they worked, based on the long term perceived impacts on their health, academic success, engagement, and/or post-graduation employability.

Within the model, bi-directional arrows are used to emphasize the two-way relationship between components. For example, participants' reasons for working were tied to the work environment they chose, and vice versa: with Jack, I witnessed a change in reasons for working between the first and second interviews. In our first interview, Jack explained that he worked primarily to make money and this lack of specificity in his rationale was paralleled by his job selection process: he randomly applied for jobs until he found one in retail. In our second interview (which occurred fourteen weeks later), however, his primary reason for working had shifted: he now wanted to gain relevant work experience and so he quit his retail associate role and was applying for positions through the Simon Fraser University's Beedie School of Business Co-operative Education program.


Reasons for Working

Angela is a 19-year-old female working as a cashier at a fast food restaurant. She works twice a week, usually between four and five hours per shift. Angela finds working while studying manageable. She has good relationships with her co-workers and supervisors, and her work accommodates her to make changes to her schedule during exam time. Each of these aspects of her work helps her to reduce stress. Overall, she enjoys the social aspect of working, and feels that she is gaining a lot of skills on the job. She felt that working was a good use of her time as it helped her to exercise her brain. Without work, she felt that she would just spend more time eating and sleeping. Angela does not feel that work is adversely affecting her in terms of stress, exercise, or her ability to maintain her 3.42 GPA; however, she indicated that the number of courses in which she is enrolled can have a negative impact on these aspects of her life. Her parents are supportive of her working, as they see value in the skill-building nature of the work she does; indeed, they often express pride to others about Angela’s job.

When I asked Angela why she worked while studying, she indicated that the primary reason was because she needed to earn money to pay her tuition fees. However, she went on to share that having a job meant more to her than simply an opportunity to earn extra money: she also felt that working in a fast-food restaurant allowed her to build her communication and numeracy skills. According to Angela, her job also kept her mind busy in a productive way, and was therefore a good use of her free time. As with Angela, it was common for participants to cite more than one reason for working; I now present the most common reasons, which included financial gain and building relevant experience.

Financial Gain

Each of the sixteen participants made it clear that earning money was an important reason for maintaining their part-time jobs during their studies. However, the need to earn money was more essential for some students than for others. For example, Bart, Tina, and Jack’s earnings covered their day-to-day living costs, as well as their academic expenses, and any extra funds were funneled back into their households. These three students worked to support themselves, to pay for their academic pursuits, and to contribute to their families. When asked why she chose to work, Tina responded, “It would be to pay for my studies. That would be the primary reason unless my parents need some funds and stuff. I buy groceries and stuff, but the main thing is to pay for my studies.” For other participants, working was not tied to earning money for essentials, such as food and academic expenses, but rather to gaining financial independence. Six students noted that
they worked so that they didn’t have to rely on their parents for food, clothes, entertainment, transportation, and other non-essential items. Consider, for example, the following quotation from Fran from the first interview:

I don’t like to ask my parents for money, and they pay for school, which is already a lot of money. Spending money and gas for my car and everything I want to pay for myself, so I don’t ask them for that.

Fran’s sentiment was echoed by Sally, whose parents also paid for tuition:

I feel like it is because when you are nineteen it is kinda weird to keep asking your parents to buy things for you. So I don’t do that anymore. I also feel like I am too old for that. And I think that is also one of the reasons I keep working.

In some cases, parents offered to pay for tuition, but participants chose to work anyway because they felt the need for financial independence and did not want to burden their parents with extra costs. Vanessa, who had a long history of working while studying, worked close to twenty-one hours a week at a financial institution so that she could remain financially independent from her parents:

I think that they have always wanted to support me, but they should have different priorities. Like I know obviously a mortgage and all these other things, and I don’t want to continue to add to that burden, so in order for me to kind of still put myself through school, I feel that I should be working. I think it is also just being able to prove to my family that I can do it too, that I can stand on my own two feet. I have always been a very independent person, so for them to even offer to pay is always a bit of a war (laughter).

Vanessa linked her work to both a desire to spare her parents from debt, and also her strong need to remain financially independent; she expressed that it was important that she prove to her parents that she could, “stand on her own two feet.”

Although, while all the participants reported that making money was a primary reason for them to maintain their part-time jobs, the matter of compensation was not often raised in the interviews. When the participants did talk about how much they were being paid, it was often based on their reflections that they were being very well compensated for their work. Additionally, the students mentioned compensation if they changed jobs or received a raise between the first and second interviews. At $18.25 per hour, Vanessa
was the highest wage earner in the study. She stated that her work environment was “…mundane and in some cases, not motivating” and that the high wage was a strong factor for keeping her in her position. At the other end of the earnings scale, ten of the sixteen participants earned close to minimum wage. In the first interview, Tina worked one of these minimum wage jobs; however, before the second interview, her food service employer gave her a raise:

Howie: So have there been any major changes since we met last?

Tina: No. Except at work I got a raise. So I’m kind of motivated to go to work now. Now I’m making $10.50 [from $10.25]. May not be a lot but still it’s kind of encouraging to go to work.

Howie: So how much of a factor is that then, in staying at your job and going to work?

Tina: Yeah, it’s a bit motivating for me because I was kind of like, ‘Oh my god, I have to go to work and then school.’ It was a lot for me going on. And then we always think that $10.25 is not enough for us at work. So now just getting a little raise motivated me. ‘Okay, I have work and then I have school. I’m kind of okay now.’

Tina’s raise had an immediate impact on her motivation, despite the relatively small amount. Fran’s compensation also shifted during the twelve weeks between the first and second interviews, as she accepted a new position. When we met for the first interview, she was making $11/hour working as a receptionist at a physiotherapy clinic. At the second interview, she was making $15/hour working as a human resources intern for a local company. I asked her if compensation was a motivating factor in selecting a role (and whether she thought it was a motivator for other students as well), to which she responded, “definitely.” Yet she explained that compensation was not the only factor, and shared that working for minimum wage as a summer intern at a public relations firm would be ideal because of the opportunity to gain experience.

**Gaining Relevant Experience**

*Glen is a 23-year-old male who works ten to fifteen hours a week selling glasses as a retail agent. He is new to the role and sees it as a chance to learn how to sell products while exploring his strengths and his potential career paths. He shared that he learns a great deal from work, and that this learning supplements what he studies in his classes. Because his parents help him to cover his tuition expenses,*
he identified that his primary reasons for working are to gain experience and to earn money for entertainment. As a student, Glen has always maintained a part-time job: he worked as a waiter before transitioning into retail sales. He does not feel that work is negatively affecting his GPA (3.11), and, instead, sees working as a good way to be productive: he shared that he would probably just “waste” the extra time if he was not working. Glen feels that work sometimes gets in the way of exercising, but is not generally affecting his health in a negative manner.

Glen shared that he made the transition from working in restaurants to working in sales because he wanted the opportunity to gain experience. Specifically, he saw customer service as relevant and important for his future, and therefore sought out opportunities to build skills in this area:

I was considering marketing, MIS [management information systems], or even human resources...my job is related but not like 100% related. Like for example, as a Sales Associate I have to face customers. If I want to do something that is related to marketing or something in the human resources department, I will also have to deal with customers.

While he was not yet decided on his post-graduation employment plans, he saw elements of the sales associate role as being applicable to a range of future roles. Glen also looked upon the sales associate role as a way to gain experience in sales. In his words, “It’s all about sales. So it would be somewhat beneficial for my future development and also my career development too. So I always want to have a chance to develop the skills that [are] related to my future.” Like Glen, several other participants (including Bart, Betty, and Simon) reflected that the opportunity to gain relevant experience to supplement their career development was a primary reason for maintaining a part-time job during their studies.

**Summary: Why do students work?**

As it turns out, students do not work for any singular reason. However, each of the sixteen participants that I interviewed cited financial gain as an important factor influencing them to work part-time throughout their studies. Some of the participants used the revenue to cover the costs of school, while others used their money for non-essential items and activities, and as a means of being financially independent from their parents. Students taking part in the study also reported that they worked to gain valuable experience, which
they hoped would assist them in getting into co-operative education programs and student clubs, or in securing full-time roles with employers post-graduation.

What became clear to me from the interviews was how busy the participants were, not only in their academic programs and part-time jobs, but also with their extra-curricular activities, family commitments, and the time required to commute between each of these obligations. In the next component of the descriptive model, entitled ‘On the Job’, I will present what it is like for students to work part-time and study, and reflect on the ways that the work environment contributed to this experience.

“What is it like to work and study?”

Vanessa is a 21-year-old female who works twenty-one hours a week as a teller at a financial institution. Earning an income to pay for school is very important for her and she prides herself on being, for the most part, financially independent from her parents. She is developing many relevant skills from both her part-time job and her volunteer activities, which help her to be successful in her group projects and assignments. Vanessa is very involved as a writing mentor, school ambassador, and executive of a large student club. These commitments often leave her with limited free time, and force her to be extremely organized with her schedule.

Throughout our interviews, Vanessa described a very busy schedule consisting of work, academic, and social commitments. She shared that working part-time was an excellent fit with her, and something that she had done since high school:

I think it is very exciting to be honest. I don’t like being idle, and I think if I was just doing school I would be painfully bored, and if I was just working I would be painfully bored. It is a very interesting dynamic. It just feels like using different sides of your brain, different ways of thinking and working and stuff. And it is nice to be challenged.

For Vanessa, working was an excellent addition to her busy academic and social schedule as it challenged her in different ways than her academics and tied her extra-curricular time to something productive. However, as Vanessa added, working and studying came with its challenges, especially during busy times of the semester: “There are certainly times during the semester, especially right now when finals are very heavy, or projects are very heavy and you can feel very time constrained working at the same
time.” What is it like to work and study? For participants in this study there were advantages and disadvantages.

The following section highlights specific impressions of what it was like for participants, and the workplace factors that contributed to the perceptions of the participants.

When asked broadly about their experiences, each of the sixteen participants used positive language to describe what it was like to work, and generally commented that they saw working as a productive way to earn money, gain experience, and stay busy. Sally commented that although her friends told her it might be difficult to balance work and school, it was not as challenging as she has initially anticipated: “It’s turning out better than I thought. Everybody says it is going to be stressful, but I don’t think so…if I didn’t have work I would come back and probably spend a lot of time just doing nothing.” Lydia echoed, as many of the participants did, that work was something productive she could do to make use of extra time:

What is it like? I think it’s a really good break between my studies because I can’t study all day. So it’s nice to get out, interact with people, maybe think about my studies while at work right? I process the material, and then come home, review it. So I think it’s a nice break instead of maybe watching TV or going to a movie with my friends.

Fran even suggested that working in moderation while studying was something that all students should do: “I think everyone should do it. Like a few hours of work a week I think will do you good, just because you’re not wasting time.” She went on to say, “I like being busy in a way that I can plan things accordingly so that I’m not doing nothing. And I feel like having a job keeps me on track…as weird as that sounds.”

Despite their overall positive reflections on their experiences, the participants did note some challenge associated with working while studying, especially when comparing themselves to students who were not working. For Betty, it was sometimes difficult to commute to work on Friday nights; she commented that when she saw people – especially people who she perceived to be non-working students – heading out for a night of socializing, she would sometimes envy them:
I think that people who aren’t working while studying have more time to slack off, and you know, have more fun. And sometimes I do envy them. Like there are so many times I am on the sky train and there are girls, you know wearing mini-skirts and drinking vodka on the train. And they are going somewhere obviously, and I’m going to work and I’m miserable. But at the same time, when I walk away from my job, I feel satisfied that I am doing something to benefit my future, and they aren’t - you’re not going to get a lot of benefit from getting drunk on a Saturday night. So, my boyfriend keeps reminding me, ‘don’t worry there is long term payoff’.

Working while studying, while providing numerous benefits for participants, also comes with its challenges. In some cases, participants like Betty would remind themselves of the long-term payoff to their post-graduation employability to get through the tough times, and in other cases, working students would rely on supportive co-workers and supervisors. Participants often spoke about the people at work, and the special role they played in shaping, supporting and creating rich relationships. As illustrated in the next section, strong supportive relationships at work may to act as a buffer to support students during challenging times associated with balancing work and academic commitments.

The People at Work

Tina is a 21-year-old female who works between twenty-four and thirty-two hours a week in a fast food restaurant. Tina and her family immigrated to Canada from Malaysia several years ago; she chose SFU because the Surrey campus is close to home. Tina feels supported by her co-workers at work, and often socializes with them after shifts. Even though her job is not directly related to her field of study, the flexible schedule and social nature of the work environment make it appealing for her to stay. She works primarily to earn money to pay for tuition and to help her parents financially. Tina was an A+ university student while studying in Malaysia, but since moving to Canada and starting to work part-time, she has seen her GPA drop to 3.48. She feels that work is having a negative impact on her GPA but financial constraints mean that she must maintain her part-time job. She also feels that she isn’t able to exercise as much as she would like, eat properly, or get enough sleep due to her busy schedule; she sometimes skips meals and falls asleep in class because she is so busy and overtired.

During our interviews, Tina talked a lot about her co-workers and how close she has become with them. Indeed, she described how she spent her first Christmas in Canada with her co-workers while the rest of her family was in Malaysia:

It had just been a year and a half since I had been in Canada. So for Christmas I had nowhere to go…my co-workers knew I was new and they invited me over and I just went. And it was really fun. Like you know, it’s Christmas, everybody’s having
fun and you're at home. Like they understood me and they invited me and we had [a] party together.

She went on to describe her work environment, specifically her co-workers, as a family, sharing that they do not always all get along, which makes them feel even more like a family. The social nature of the work environment, and the friends that she has made contribute positively to her a sense of belonging at work, and make the long work-weeks more bearable.

Other participants also shared that their co-workers had a direct impact on their experiences on the job, and that working with supportive, fun colleagues made a substantial difference in getting through the day. Isabel, working in a fast-paced retail environment, said the following in appreciation for her supportive co-workers:

I mean on some days when I know it’s going to be busy, it’s kinda like, a dreadful feeling. But then I know that working with my team members, they make it more bearable I guess. We're all going through the same thing so...we support each other.

Holly also mentioned the support of her co-workers in her interview: “Working with people that you get along with makes the day go by much faster. You get the support you need.”

Ten of the sixteen participants said that they socialized with their colleagues outside of work hours, with some mentioning that they spend more time with their co-workers, and friends they made at work, than with their fellow Beedie students.

**Supervisors**

The participants used a variety of language to describe their work supervisors: some were described as mentors while others were admired for their work ethic and still others were described as strict micro-managers. For example, when asked to rate his boss on a scale of one to ten – one being poor, and ten being excellent – Jack gave his supervisor a three. He went on to describe her using the following language: “She’s very overbearing and has a concrete sense of what she wants...she clashes with a lot of other people’s way of thinking.” Fran’s supervisor also exhibited characteristics of a micro-manager, and used technology to keep a constant watch on her:
Recently he [supervisor] added a security camera right like behind our heads. And that’s been adding a lot of like, I’m kind of annoyed with that because he’s been telling us ‘oh, it’s for security reasons’. but it’s pointed right at my computer and it’s not like we really do anything outside of work. So I don’t know why it’s there. And it’s creepy because sometimes he watches it [from home] while we’re working and he’ll [instant message] us about it. Yeah, it’s creepy, that’s why I don’t like working with him.

The toxic, ‘creepy’ environment created by Fran’s supervisor had a profound effect on her. Indeed, she felt so uncomfortable at work that she actually quit her job, despite it being relatively well-paying and an excellent fit with her schedule.

Vanessa had a different experience and credited her supervisors for both the quality of life at work and her satisfaction in being a teller:

So my direct supervisors are very supportive, great mentors, and my manager is a little bit more hands off in terms of her approach. And then my manager, once removed is fantastic - huge mentor, always there, very engaged.

Other participants used words like ‘approachable’, ‘friendly’, and ‘considerate’ when describing their supervisors and generally reported good working relationships with them. Supervisory relationships were often raised when students discussed needing to take time off, or adjust their schedules because of school. The impact of the supervisory relationship on such requests was crucial, since as we shall see in the next section, the need for workplace flexibility was a central theme for working students.

**Flexibility**

Flexibility was one of the workplace factors that the participants discussed frequently, generally using the term to describe the ease with which they could adjust their work schedules around their academic commitments. In all but one case, participants reported that they were able to change their work schedules if they needed more time to study or to complete projects. When asked to describe how the schedule at work was created, Holly stated:

Well they know that we all go to school so… each semester they will switch the schedule for those people in university, and make it work. They’re really good with that. That’s why I work with them.
When discussing flexibility with Betty, she shared the following story about a friend:

I had a friend who worked at McDonalds and it was in a very sketchy area and she didn’t like the job. But the reason she’s still there is because of the flexibility. She says they allow her to choose when she works, if she wants to work half a day on Monday or work an 8 hour shift on Friday. They let her do that. She says that despite the fact that she hates the job and it’s in a horrible area and she has to, you know, walk there. It’s kind of scary, like in Surrey. She said she still goes there because of the flexibility. So I think that flexibility can be huge factor in retaining students.

Participants placed a high degree of value on flexibility, and the ease by which they could adjust their work schedules to accommodate their academic schedules. Participants associated flexibility with not only the companies they worked for, as in Betty’s story noted above, but also directly with their supervisors. Working as a teller in a financial institution, Vanessa’s experience was that some branches were more flexible in accommodating her academic schedule than others, with the determining factor being the manager:

And my manager right now, she is a bit more hesitant to give days off. She will do her best to accommodate them, but you can tell when you bring it up to her in conversation, that she is not very comfortable with it. She has a very traditional outlook, you should be here to do your job and if you can’t, you need to find someone else to be here. And I know that I have worked at other branches and they are like, ‘You know school is important to you, it is totally fine, no problem’. So I think it depends on the personality, and the manager.

Bart reported a high degree of flexibility in his workplace, and attributed this flexibility to his relationship with his supervisor:

My supervisor offers a lot of flexibility for me in terms of my work hours. I generally show up between 8:00 and 9:00 in the morning and leave maybe between 4:30 and 6:00 depending on my work schedule and what needs to be done that day. She’s more focused on making sure the work is being done as opposed to me working an exact set of hours. And for me being in school and having other duties that I need to do, it’s really good to have that kind of flexibility. And it, it’s not just Monday, Wednesday, Friday. I can move days around if I need to. Typically on exam days she allows me to move my work days to other days if I have an exam on the same day I have work.

Co-workers and supervisors, and the degree of flexibility present in the role, were all important factors in enabling participants to honour their commitments to work and academics and successfully maintain the balance.
Summary: Students at Work

During the interviews, I was able to find out more about why students chose to work, and what it was like for them on the job, which led to a better understanding of their experiences. All except one student described work as social, predominantly welcoming environments where they could make money, gain relevant experience, and use their free time productively. Supportive supervisors and co-workers played an important role in diffusing workplace stress and creating environments that led to employee engagement and retention. Because of the variability of the academic workload, the participants saw flexibility as an important factor in a workplace, one that played a significant role in attracting and retaining student employees. A high degree of flexibility in a manager, or workplace, enabled students to plan their work around their academics, rather than the other way around, and resulted in them being able to better manage the collision between work and academics.

In the following section, I will present the next components of the descriptive model, The Collision of Work and School, and Work and Academics: Developing Necessary Competencies and share the more immediate impacts of intertwining school and work.

Immediate Impacts: The Collision of Work and School

Mandy is a 20-year-old female who works ten hours a week as an office manager at a premium restaurant chain; she also occasionally takes on evening shifts as a banquet bartender at a local hotel. Mandy is committed to her job, to the point where she sometimes skips classes to work. Time is in limited supply for Mandy as, in addition to her two jobs, she is also an executive of a large student club, and can spend up to three hours a day commuting.

Mandy articulated a feeling shared by many of the students involved in this study when she said that, at first, all of her commitments made her feel like “superwoman,” like she could “do all of this” and be successful. However, despite her intense desire to be involved with multiple commitments, she also reflected that there was a point at which she had to recognize that she had limited time and energy:

I think it comes to a point where I feel stressed. But at the same time I still have that ambition to do well at everything that I’m involved in. And I realized that I don’t
want to spread myself too thin by being involved in so many things. But I can only put in so much energy for each of those things.

At one point, Mandy had too much on her plate and needed to take some time off. As she put it, her immune system “…kind of broke down.” The result was that she re-evaluated how she was spending her time and acknowledged that she couldn’t do it all:

on one hand I’m really interested in what I’m doing, but [on] the other hand I have to admit I only have 24 hours in a day so there’s no way I can do everything that I want without you know draining myself out.

Many of the participants, including Mandy, expressed that significant stress often resulted when work commitments interfered with academic demands (or what I call “the collision of school and work”). Resulting stress from the collision of work and school often resulted in participants making changes to their schedules, and is one reason that participants valued flexible work schedules. For example, in order to find more balance in her schedule, Mandy decided to scale back on her hours of work and rely on the money she had saved up from student loans. Her story is a good example of the detrimental impacts that can result from the collision of work and school: when students try to “do everything,” they can often spread themselves too thin and end up unhappy with their level of success in each of the areas of their lives. Mandy’s story also illustrates the continual adjustments that students make to their work schedules, not only based on short-term impacts on time, but also due to longer-term impacts on health; the larger bi-directional arrows from the far right of the model back to the far left are used to visually depict this feedback loop.

**Working Student Affect**

The collision of work and school had an immediate impact on how participants felt and these emotional responses are fundamental to understanding the overall experiences of working students. As a trained counsellor, I was careful to attend to the participant’s emotions and used a variety of interview techniques to do this including active listening, reflection and paraphrasing; in some cases I slowed the pace of the interview to allow for participants to thoughtfully reflect on questions that evoked anger, fear, or anxiety (Weiss, 1994). In other cases, I used humour and/or self-disclosure to build rapport with
participants and mirror their excitement. Figure 2 outlines five broad themes related to the participants' affect that arose from my interviews. Some of the participants expressed that the collision between work and school left them with positive feelings of confidence, independence, and connectedness. For example, as above, Mandy noted that being able to successfully balance work and school left her feeling like ‘superwoman’: Vanessa used the word ‘exciting’ to describe what it was like for her to work part-time and study. Several participants also commented that they felt welcomed and connected at work due to the friendly and accepting nature of their supervisors and colleagues. In Betty’s words,

Yeah, I love the people that I work with and I guess they’re really starting to like me…Yeah, it’s really great to be able to be a part of a team where you feel like welcome and wanted, and that definitely impacts just how I feel about going to work and how much I like my job.

In addition, working also had an immediate impact on some of the participants’ sense of independence; as already noted, six of the sixteen participants shared that earning money allowed them to become financially independent from their parents.
Figure 3: Working Student Affect: Immediate Impacts of Working Part-time

Working Student Affect: Immediate Impacts of Working Part-time

The collision of work and school resulted in some participants feeling:

• Welcomed: to the work environment by supportive supervisors and co-workers
• Independent: when working led to financial independence from parents
• Confident: in knowing that working part-time will contribute to post-graduation employability
• Invigorated: by successfully balancing work and school commitments – feeling like “superwoman”
• Pressured: due to the time constraints associated with working and studying

The collision of work and school, however, also left all of the participants feeling pressured for time. This pressure, in turn, led to elevated levels of stress and anxiety, particularly when it came to meeting their academic deadlines. As we shall see in the next section, not having enough time to manage work, academic, extra-curricular, and other commitments was the most commonly shared negative impact of part-time work.

Time Constraints – A Shortage of Time

The participants in the study noted that working impacted their time in many ways. For working students in this study, free time was seen as a luxury item, something that when possessed would be used to catch-up on sleep or assignments, or socialize with friends. When the participants had less free time, they had to become more efficient and to make difficult decisions about how to allocate their limited time to competing demands. Interestingly, the participants noted that it was not just time at work that eroded their free time, but also the time needed to get to and from work.
Five of the sixteen students faced a commute from school to work that exceeded sixty minutes, one-way. These long commute times, alongside awkward working schedules, often resulted in difficulty balancing work and academic priorities, and negatively impacted the participants’ ability to study:

It can be challenging, especially when the shifts are at very awkward times. I find 4:00PM is super awkward, because it takes me an hour to get there, and then, an hour afterwards to get home. So, especially if I want to study [after working] on a Saturday night, I find myself studying really late. (Betty)

Tina, who sometimes spent more than three hours a day commuting by bus from home to school, also noted the commute as a major factor in planning her day:

So when I get an evening shift, it’s like until 11[pm] and I have to wait till 11:30 [pm] to get the bus. So I get home around midnight….now I’m having my dinner. After dinner, I can’t go back to sleep right away, so I have to wait few hours. So it’s already like 2 in the morning before I can go to sleep. And then I have to wake up at 6 because I have to take a one hour bus ride to Burnaby because I have an 8:30 class.

Tina’s commute, on top of working twenty-five to thirty hours a week and her busy academic schedule, meant that the amount of sleep she was able to get was often compromised.

Each of the sixteen participants reported that their part-time jobs were not the only activity outside of school that demanded their attention. As such, it was also important to consider priorities external to both school and work in order to gain a sense of the students’ overall experiences. Holly was the only participant who played an organized SFU sport was also involved in an on-campus club. When asked what it was like for her to work and study, she said:

It’s hard because I also play [a team sport] for SFU. I know it’s not varsity but we still do practices and games and stuff, and I’m also in a [club] so, I have a lot going on. I don’t think I’ve ever had a free day.

Holly’s academic, work and extra-curricular commitments meant that every day was tied to a pursuit. Given the challenges that Holly and the participants experienced balancing all of their commitments, many of them shared that they have developed specific coping strategies that help them to stay organized. The next section will reflect on the skills that
the participants have been able to develop, both directly from their jobs and indirectly from their experiences balancing a variety of commitments including both academics and part-time work.

**Work and School – Developing Necessary Competencies**

*Ralph is a 19-year-old male who works as a residence advisor at SFU. As an advisor, Ralph is required to live on campus, and is often on call 24 hours a day. He is academically driven and very organized and uses planning and scheduling as a way to maintain his 3.95 GPA. As part of this planning, he also continually asks himself the questions, “What am I doing?” and “Is this productive?” to keep himself on track. He spends a great deal of time with his work colleagues outside of work hours, including exercising and socializing with them.*

During our interviews, Ralph cited organizational skills as central to his ability to maintain balance in his busy life. Furthermore, he reflected that working while studying has allowed him to improve these skills:

> I work with another partner community advisor…so trying to organize his schedule and my schedule and getting them to mesh together. When can he be on-call and I be on-call, and make sure this fits with all these events that are running? So kind of organizing my schedule and then looking at my partner’s schedule and being, ‘Okay I need him for these nights or these days’, so trying to manage both of them I think. But it’s helped me to work on my organization skills and like, kind of grow them so I look at it as the benefit.

Staying organized was a necessity for him due to the 24/7 nature of his role. For example, he and his fellow community advisors were responsible for organizing residence events, while also being available and accessible to students in the building anytime that they were “on-duty.” This often meant students dropping in, un-scheduled, to talk with him about issues they were facing. These responsibilities required that Ralph stay very organized in order to maintain his 3.95 GPA, meet the requirements of his job, and support his students and co-workers.

As noted earlier, many of the participants shared that their part-time jobs sometimes made it difficult to get everything done. Interestingly, this lack of time seemed to have a positive impact on some of the participants, as they reported that having to balance the competing demands of school and work resulted in improved time
management skills. Indeed, seven of the participants reported that they considered themselves to be more efficient at studying than their non-working peers because they had less time. Sally, who confessed to having poor time management skills, commented that working part-time made her use her time more effectively:

So I wouldn’t say that work is a bad thing. I think in fact work helps because if I work and I go home I know that I only have this much time to do something. So I’ll actually do it. It helps me be more organized, but sometimes I wish I could do certain things like run a blog or something like that and I don’t have time.

Isabel echoed these comments, and added that working reduced the amount she procrastinated:

Well for me I think when you have a busier schedule it kind of forces you to be better at time management. So for me if I’m going to school and then working for the whole day, then I’ll really work more efficiently, and study more efficiently when I get home. So I don’t really procrastinate as much as if I had nothing to do then.

Ralph, Isabel and Sally’s comments suggest that working students have less time to allocate to academic pursuits, and have found ways to make the most of their limited time.

Participants such as Isabel and Vanessa also used their smart phone calendars and/or paper agendas to keep their work, school, and other commitments organized. When asked how she managed all of her responsibilities, Isabel responded with the following:

If I am working and going to school then I use an agenda or my phone schedule to really remind me when I have to be doing what and what’s, what’s coming up next. So I don’t forget anything because it’s really easy to forget when you’re running around.

Vanessa – who was working twenty-one hours per week and an executive in one of Beedie’s largest student clubs – found that colour coding her calendar was necessary to keep her organized:

To understand what my priorities are, I like to colour code things, a lot. When I look in my calendar, I know exactly what is what. I probably started doing that when I was younger, before I started working because if all the competitions for dance. Nowadays the best thing that helps me is probably colour coordinating my calendar.
In addition to using agendas, other techniques to reduce procrastination and improve manage time were noted. For example, Isabel described the technique that she uses to ensure that she makes the most of her time at the library:

Well, on my laptop, I have a Macbook and there’s this app called ‘self-control’. And basically what it does is just blocks off whatever sites you want, or it could block off everything on the internet. So if I really can’t focus, then I turn it on and you can like adjust how many hours or how long you want it on for. And then, once it’s set then nothing you do will turn it off until the time span’s gone. So that really prevents me from doing anything else.

Participants noted above shared that they needed to be organized in order to ensure that they were completing assignments and staying on top of all their commitments, and shared a number of organizational strategies that they used to accomplish this.

**Summary: Learning to Survive**

In the section above, I presented two components of the descriptive model: *The Collision of Work and Academics*; and *Work and Academics: Developing Necessary Competencies* as a means of illustrating the immediate impact working had on participants’ time, and the skills, knowledge and attitudes that working students developed to cope with this pressure. Indeed, working students in this study reported having less time to allocate to a range of activities, including sleep, socializing, and academics. They also noted that this lack of time had forced them to be more efficient, and in most cases, had also forced them to quickly develop organizational and time management skills.

**Broader Impacts**

In this section, I share the components of the descriptive model that contain participants’ reflections on the broader, and longer-term impacts of working part-time while studying, including *Academic Success, Physical and Mental Health, Engagement: On and Off-Campus*, and *Post-Graduation Employability (PGE).*
Working and Academic Success

The scholarly literature concerning students’ part-time work commitments is largely focused on the impact that part-time work has on academic success (see, for example Barke et al., 2000; Carney, McNeish, & McColl, 2005; Curtis & Nimmer, 1991; Curtis & Williams, 2002; Greenbank, Hepworth, & Mercer, 2009; Humphrey, 2006; Metcalf, 2003; Taylor et al., 1999). In the present study, I categorized the participants’ comments about the impact of their part-time work on their ability to succeed academically as either positive, negative, or no impact. Positive impacts were noted by four participants and were most often attributed to having less time to study, which made them more efficient and effective in their preparations for their classes. These four participants also noted that working part-time had allowed them to acquire relevant skills, which made them stronger students and therefore had a positive impact on their grades. Eight of the participants noted that there was no direct link between their part-time work and their GPAs; however, they too felt that they had learned skills on the job that made them stronger students. Conversely, the four remaining participants felt that working part-time had had a detrimental effect on their academic success. Interestingly, these participants cited their lack of time to study and complete projects as having a negative impact on their grades, in direct opposition to the participants who felt that their time pressures had allowed them to become efficient and effective in their school work. In the next sections, I will highlight the connection between working part-time and GPA, as demonstrated by exemplary quotations from my participant interviews. In addition, I will explore the issue of academic pressure: the participants in this study more readily attributed challenges of academic success to the difficulty of their courses than to their part-time work.

Positive or No Perceived Impact on Academic Success Reported

Isabel is a 20-year-old female who works fifteen to twenty hours per week at a bistro located in a large retail store. She feels that her role is loosely related to her area of study since she is able to observe a successful business in operation. Her GPA is 3.6 and has improved since she began working part-time. Isabel lives at home with her parents in Surrey and her commute from home to work is only ten minutes long. However, her commute from home to school is much more substantial and she feels that travel between home and school adds to her time constraints. Isabel does not find her part-time job to be mentally or physically demanding. Furthermore, she likes her co-workers, considers her supervisors to be supportive, and is thankful for her flexible work schedule. She works for the

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opportunity to earn money so that she can be financially independent from her parents, to gain experience, and to socialize.

Like the majority of the students who participated in this study, Isabel felt that working part-time while studying was not having a detrimental impact on her grades. In fact, she shared with me that working part-time forced her to be more organized, thereby contributing to her overall academic success:

I don’t think it’s hindering my progress, since it actually makes me better. Since giving me less time to do nothing, so I guess it like pushes me to work harder. Since I have limited time so I have to manage my time better and actually do work instead of multitasking and doing work while like watching TV or all these other things.

In addition to improved time management, Isabel mentioned that the customer service nature of her role had helped her learn how to deal with difficult people more effectively, a skill that she felt was also having a positive impact on her academics:

So then, when I do have group work at school it helps me you know maybe to connect with them better and just know them easier…and know how to interact with them. When I deal with difficult customers that kind of applies too if I have a difficult group member, I’ll know how to talk towards them without getting angry. If you’re angry at work that’s not very good, so you have to figure out other ways to deal with difficult situations.

For Isabel, working part-time was having a positive effect on her academic success as having a job meant she had to be more organized. She was also learning skills on the job that she was able to apply in the classroom, which was a theme that was shared by other students in this study.

When asked how their part-time work was affecting their academic progress, twelve of the sixteen participants commented that there was either no negative impact on their grades, or that working part-time was having a positive impact on their academic success. Participants who noted a positive impact sometimes tied higher marks to the interpersonal skills they learned on the job. For example, Fran shared that it was the skills she had obtained over years of working that led to changes in her personality, and an improved GPA. As she explained:
Well I used to be really shy before I started working. Actually, in grade eight I was really shy. Maybe also because I was transitioning from elementary school to high school. So that first year I was really quiet and then, in grade nine and ten when I started working, I was a social butterfly.

When asked to comment on the connection that she saw between improved interpersonal skills and a high mark on a project, Fran shared that, “If you’ve already worked with a difficult person (on the job) before and then you have to do it again in school, then you guys can have a better project, and get a better grade.” As with Isabel, Fran identified her improved interpersonal skills as an academic asset for group work.

Not all of the participants were able to draw a direct link between their jobs and improved grades; however, many saw a connection between working part-time and the development of relevant skills. When I asked Ralph if the skills he was learning as a residence advisor were making him a stronger student and helping him to maintain his 3.95 GPA, he responded with the following:

I’m not sure they translate all that well into academics other being able to obviously be pretty personable and have some interpersonal skills. As far as academics go I don’t know if these skills totally help you out a lot, other than forcing you to be organized.

Interestingly, while Ralph was able to link the skills he was learning on the job to working more productively with his fellow students, he did not, as demonstrated above, identify these skills with any direct academic benefits. Tina also mentioned that her part-time work had built her confidence, noting that she had more “guts” to respond to questions in class and in tutorials. Her improved confidence, she shared, was developed by working in a fast-paced restaurant where she was required to call out orders to other service team members. However, like Ralph, she did not link her improved confidence to academic success. All of the participants shared that they had learned skills on the job, but not all may have been able to identify them, and/or understand the benefits they derived from them.

In contrast to the interpersonal skills noted by participants, a few of the students were able to make direct use of technical skills they had learned at work on class assignments, resulting in improved academic performance. Bart, who worked in
bookkeeping and studied accounting, shared that he was able to make a clear connection between his work and his academics. As he described,

I started taking more upper level accounting courses last semester and found them very difficult - they are very, very difficult courses. But what I found was my work allowed me to look at real life scenarios where you’re actually using what you’re studying. So after a while, everything starts to click, and I ended up being a lot more successful because of that.

Overall, while the majority of participants cited no detrimental impact on their academic success, as we shall see in the next section, there were participants who felt that their grades were being negatively impacted by working part-time.

**Detrimental Impact on Academic Success Reported**

Bart is a 21-year-old male who took part in the study during the summer. Due to this timing, he was only taking one course, but was happy to share his experiences from other semesters when he was taking a full course load. Bart works twenty-four to twenty-seven hours per week as a bookkeeper. He maintains this part-time job for three reasons: 1. To gain experience, 2. To earn money to pay for his tuition, and 3. To gain relevant experience that will help him land a job after graduation. In addition to his bookkeeping job, he works Friday and Saturday evenings as a hockey referee, which often causes him to be too fatigued to socialize on the weekend with his friends.

Bart believed that working part-time during his studies would have a negative impact on his grades, his health, and his social life; however, he chose to maintain his job anyway because he felt that the long-term payoffs of working during his studies would make these negative impacts worthwhile. These payoffs included: developing a strong network of off-campus professionals, graduating debt-free, and amassing a wealth of experience that would make him more desirable to employers upon graduation. As he explained,

I mean some people, it takes them a long time to, you know, get their foot in the door. And I feel that, by maybe compromising my health a little bit, maybe putting in a lot of time that I could’ve spent with maybe friends or whatever, I think it’s gonna do wonders for me in the long run. I’m gonna be starting in a career that I wanna be in, a lot earlier than, than other students that are my age that are not working right now.
Like Bart, several other participants felt torn about their part-time work. While some recognized the benefits of working during their studies, they also reported difficulties coping with the added responsibilities presented by their part-time work. For example, Tina felt that her GPA would be stronger if she worked less; however, she had to work because she needed money to pay for school. As a student in Malaysia, she did not have to work, and tied this directly to her ability to achieve an A+ average. Since coming to Canada to study, and having to work to support her academic pursuits, her marks had dropped to a B+ average. Tina explained that her work schedule also made it difficult for her to access important academic resources, and further explained,

It’s just the time, that’s the main problem. On average I said work gives me twenty-four hours a week, sometimes less, but sometimes other workers just call me so it’s more than twenty-four hours a week. And since I want money, I just go and help because I have to pay for my studies. I think work is lowering my GPA, because I’d have more time to devote to my studies and do my work much better and actually go to my TAs and lectures office hours which now I can’t because I have to rush to work.

Indeed, with more time, and the ability to access university resources (office hours) Tina’s marks may have returned to the A+ range.

Mandy was another participant who felt that working part-time negatively impacted her academic success. She used the following simile to explain the relationship between her part-time work and her GPA:

It is almost like, you know, like planning an event. I could easily put something together like book a venue and get people to come, and that’s an event. Or I can really think about what decorations I am gonna use, and what kind of engagement activities. So if you really want to do a phenomenal job it requires a lot of time. And work kind of takes away that time where I can be thinking about these details that I could put into my assignment and to my presentations and things like that.

Mandy’s comments illustrate that for some working students, improved time management skills may not be enough to provide the time needed for “phenomenal” results, especially during semesters involving higher course load/difficulty. In the next section, I will present how course load and/or difficulty impacted the participant experience.
**Course Load/difficulty and Academic Success**

Sally is a 19-year-old female who works twenty hours per week. She works downtown as a stock associate in a national clothing chain, where she earns minimum wage. She considers her role to be related to her field of study due to the potential for her to move into management. Sally lives at home with her parents and spends up to an hour commuting one way from home to work. She finds it easier to meet people at work than at school, and socializes more with her work colleagues than her fellow students. Her strong relationship with her manager, who is more like a friend, the social atmosphere at work, and the flexibility around scheduling shifts all contribute to her plan to “stick around.” Sally works to earn money for clothes and social activities, and sees working part-time as a way to fill the gaps in her time that would result in procrastination. She doesn’t find working part-time while studying to be stressful, but does describe her life as “busy.” While she doesn’t have time for physical exercise, she feels that the active nature of her job might actually be contributing to good health.

Sally struggled academically and was on academic probation after her first semester; however, she was clear during our interviews that her part-time work did not cause her poor grades. According to Sally, her grades were instead influenced by a combination of course difficulty and her effort. She explained,

> My marks are getting better. When I first started, I think it was because I decided to take too many difficult courses together. So, I was on academic probation, but then I got off of that and my GPA is going up. It is going better now. I honestly don’t think it was because of work. It was more so because I didn’t try hard enough in the first semester. But I did take a lot of business courses together…everybody’s like you shouldn’t take them together.

Sally added that there were courses in her first semester that she hadn’t been exposed to in high school, which also contributed to her being placed on academic probation; she had found the volume of new, difficult content was overwhelming for her.

Sally was not the only participant to share a connection between course load/difficulty and academic performance, with Angela commenting that,

> I don’t think working part-time affects my grades much. The thing that affects my academics is how many courses I take, and the number of units in that course. So if I take four or three really tough ones then my GPA is stable. And even if I work or, even if I work more or less I feel like it doesn’t affect my GPA.

Certain courses were noted for their difficulty by participants, and could often play a significant factor in determining marks for the semester. As Betty explained,
It will entirely depend on my business communications course. That one has a pretty hard reputation for being pretty miserable. So if I do OK in that, I can possibly surpass, but if I don't, then it might dip a little bit, but that will be OK with me.

Sally and Betty's comments are indicative of a broader theme, namely that working part-time was generally not seen by the participants to have as substantial an impact on academic success as course load/difficulty was. While a few of the participants reported that with more time, their GPAs would be higher, the majority reported that their part-time jobs either had no impact, or a positive impact on their grades.

**Summary: The Impact of Part-Time Work on Students’ Academic Success**

The participants shared numerous stories about how working had affected their academic performance, but were more inclined to link working to stronger grades because of the improved time management and interpersonal skills that were learned on the job; improved confidence and ability to resolve conflicts were also positively tied to academic success. In addition, when asked to comment on working and their academic success, it was very common for participants to cite course load/difficulty as one of the most powerful factors influencing their GPAs; in most instances, this link was seen to be stronger than the connection between working part-time and GPA.

**Working and Health**

A key issue addressed in this study was the connection between the participants’ part-time work and their mental and physical health. In order to explore this connection, I asked participants to share how their jobs affected their ability to lead healthy lives; physical and mental health were not explicitly defined, and were instead left intentionally open to allow the participants to discuss health in whatever ways felt relevant and appropriate to them in their lives. In the next section, I present participant experiences in the descriptive model (Figure 2) that relate to the component *Physical and Mental Health* to illustrate how working part-time impacted the physical and mental wellbeing of working students.
How Does Working Affect a Student’s Physical Health?

When I asked the participants how their part-time work was affecting their physical health, nine responded that work was not getting in the way of their physical health while four commented that their jobs were actually contributing to their activity levels by keeping them moving, bending, and lifting. Isabel, who worked in a cafeteria, mentioned that her job could be physically demanding:

Well for my job you kind of do physical work, you have to lift food or supplies, like cups or whatever and it does get pretty heavy sometimes, like for example hot dogs. I have to stock everything, so I have to lift everything from the storage room, outside, and everything. That’s the physical work. So I guess it kind of keeps me fit, so you’re not always just standing there, sitting down. You have to be running around.

Sally also noted the physical demands of her role in retail, and linked these demands to her overall activity levels in a positive way, “Maybe it helps because I am on my feet the whole time at work. Whereas if I was at home I’d just be lying on the couch or something.” Working students in the study repeatedly shared that they felt pressed for time. Sally’s comments shed light on a positive aspect of working, namely that in the right role, a working student may be able to not only make money, but also stay physically fit.

In contrast, five of the participants stated that their part-time work – combined with other time intensive activities such as studying, volunteering, and commuting – had a negative impact on their health by reducing the time they could commit to physical activity as well as meal planning and preparation. For example, Sally indicated that she felt that she did not have time for exercise. At the time of the first interview, she was working twenty hours per week while taking fifteen academic credit hours. In addition, she had to spend up to an hour commuting, each way, to both work and school. She explained, “I have noticed that I don’t really think I have time for physical activity. Whereas before, I would maybe do a little bit. But now I just don’t have the time for it.” Lydia described that she was able to fit exercise in during the school year, but she had to cut it out during the exam period to give herself enough time to study.

Four of the participants raised eating habits as a health factor that was both directly and negatively impacted by their part-time work. Most commonly, the participants
explained that their busy working schedules meant that they had less time to plan and prepare healthy meals. As a result, they either skipped meals entirely or ate fast foods. Glen noted that he often wasn’t able to take his scheduled breaks at work because he was busy with customers. As such, he was frequently hungry on the job.

Isabel, who had ready access to the fast food served at work, noted that balancing her work and studies was having a negative effect on her diet:

I think I’m okay physically, I mean I don’t have any like issues with my health or anything, I’m not overweight or anything like that. But I feel like eating-wise, I’m not the healthiest. Well mostly because I’m on campus for most of the day, so I’m eating out. And then also when I work I usually have my meals in the restaurant, which doesn’t have the healthiest [food]. So that’s usually why I eat unhealthy foods. Eating-wise, I’m eating more on campus, it’s like two out of three meals will be on campus. And it’s hard to find, like, healthier options I’d say.

Despite the reflections of the participants discussed above, most of the participants in this study felt that their physical health was not being negatively affected by their part-time work. However, five of the participants reported that their physical health had been indirectly impacted in a negative manner by reducing time for physical exercise and meal planning and preparation.

The Impact of Part-Time Work on Mental Health

Jack is a 20-year-old male who works ten hours per week as a retail associate. He has completed sixty academic credits towards his degree. He started working part-time a year ago, and hasn’t noticed a difference with his cumulative grade point average, which has remained unchanged at 2.67. Jack considers himself to be a “slacker,” and admits that he doesn’t study the recommended amount of time. He considers himself to be engaged with the campus community and feels this engagement is important. He estimates that he spends three to five hours per week on campus, hanging out with friends and being involved with student clubs. When we first met, he had a clear post-graduation plan established, but during our second interview (fourteen weeks later) he was considering dropping out of university and taking an intensive course in computer programming.

Jack was one of the only students in the study who reported sustained, elevated stress levels, which he attributed directly to his part-time work. Jack’s heightened levels of stress may have resulted from the mundane nature of his job, from feeling detached from his co-workers, and/or from his strained relationship with his “micro-managing” supervisor.
Despite this stress, Jack felt strongly that all Beedie students should work part-time during their studies so that they could learn how to work with people more effectively. He described the “real-world” exposure he encountered through his job as a “slap in the face.” However, despite this seemingly negative language, he explained that this exposure was valuable for students. When asked how work was impacting his mental health, he said,

> Usually, it affects it negatively. In the sense that if I go to work I’ll pretty much always come out a bit more stressed than I was before coming in. A bit more red in the face. More irritable I guess.

Jack went on to say that he found the stress from work “manageable” and that he was able to study in a productive manner after experiencing workplace stress. However, Jack, unlike most students in the study, was clear in linking working to elevated levels of stress, which may have been due to the relationship with his supervisor, co-workers, or other factors mentioned above.

While all of the participants in the study spoke about the stress associated with balancing work and academics, most were inclined to link increased levels of anxiety to shortages of time and academic pressures, rather than to their part-time jobs. Indeed, only three of the sixteen students who participated in this study described their part-time work as the direct cause of a substantial amount of stress in their lives.

**Shortages of Time**

It became clear during my interviews that students who work part-time are often trying to accomplish a substantial number and variety of tasks in a limited amount of time. They therefore attribute any heightened levels of stress that they may experience to the sense that they “do not have enough time,” rather than attribute it directly to their part-time work. For example, Holly, who described herself as a “very stressed out person,” found that working did elevate her stress levels; however, it was not the work itself she found stressful but rather the reality that her work commitments took time away from studying. Our first interview occurred a week before her midterm exams, and when I asked her how work was affecting her stress levels, she responded that “it’s increased it because it takes away from my week of studying.” Betty also felt that working took time away from her studies, which increased her overall stress levels. As she described,
Well I think work definitely eats up some time, so that can create a lot of anxiety in regards to deadlines for school. So I have to work around school deadlines, and have to be very strict with my time during the week, so that causes more pressure in the week just so I can free up a little bit of time there. As well, if I am working all Saturday, that’s a day I can’t be exercising, or even sleeping in. So it eats up time.

Many of the participants shared similar stories of being pressed for time and of feeling, especially during peak times of the academic year, that they simply “didn’t have enough time” to get everything done. In the next section, I will present some of the strategies that the participants used to manage stress.

**Strategies for Managing Stress**

The participant interviews revealed a variety of strategies for managing the stress caused by work, academic, and social schedules. Two of the more common stress reduction tactics included choosing a role that would provide a manageable amount of stress, and making necessary changes to work schedules to allow for adequate academic preparation.

While Vanessa (along with the majority of the participants) felt that she was “in a good place,” and that work was not significantly contributing to her levels of stress, she shared that this was not always the case. In fact, one of the reasons she took her job as a teller was that it was much more manageable than her previous role as an intern at the financial institution:

I noticed that I was very tired, even if I slept a lot; it was really difficult to balance. I mentioned before that I don’t sacrifice my health, but it was hard to actually have a better standard of health for myself. So I wasn’t running as much. I didn’t get a chance to cook my own meals as much and that eventually also made me feel quite upset with myself. I wasn’t properly taking care of myself. So I did feel an imbalance and those were kind of the triggers to signify that I had an imbalance. And that’s when I decided to talk to my manager. We reviewed kind of what I’d been doing and what I could be doing. Whether it still fit or not. And then we decided that the best thing for me was just to transition to a role that allowed me to go to school and do work at the same time.

Vanessa was simply not able to manage the demands of being an intern, and needed to sacrifice a role that she wanted to do, with a role that she could do in order to fit in the
academic and extra-curricular demands. Although it meant sacrificing a more desirable role, the compromise was necessary for Vanessa’s health.

Participants also made changes to their work schedules to carve out enough time for essential activities such as eating, sleeping and studying. Mandy noted that there were times that she adjusted her work schedule to give her more time to study or sleep. In her words,

And with my other bartending job, a lot of the functions go till like 2:00AM so around winter time when it’s really busy and I have to go home after that. So that’s when I went to make the decision to tell my managers I can only work till ten, you have to let me go early. Or to push it latest eleven, otherwise I’m gonna miss my train or I have to taxi.

As noted above, working students in the study utilized different strategies to manage their stress. They also exercised, relaxed with family members, or socialized with friends to reduce stress. However, working often meant that they did not have large amounts free time to socialize outside of work to reduce their stress levels, and thus had to rely on the people at work recharge themselves mentally, or reduce on-the-job stress.

**Summary – Working and Student Health**

My participant interviews revealed that time was a precious resource for working students, who felt that time pressures sometimes made it challenging for them to exercise, eat, sleep, spend time with loved ones, and generally maintain their overall mental and physical health. Lack of sleep and increased stress levels were the top two health issues noted, with both being associated more often with academic pressure and lack of free time than directly with part-time work. Very few of the participants indicated that their physical exercise habits had been negatively impacted by their part-time work and, indeed, some felt that their jobs had provided them with physical benefits.
Working and Engagement With On- and Off-Campus Communities

Participants reported limited time to engage with the on- and off-campus communities. They shared that academic commitments, commuting, the timing of campus events, and off-campus social activities often made participating in the on-campus community difficult; however, despite these difficulties, most of the participants found ways to actively attend on-campus events. Indeed, the participants were more likely to be involved with on-campus events and activities than with those taking place off campus. In the following section I present the next component of the descriptive model, Engagement: On and Off-campus, which accounts for the impact of working on the ability to engage with relevant communities.

The Off-Campus Community

Fran is a 20-year-old female who works twelve to eighteen hours per week as a receptionist at a physiotherapy clinic. She doesn’t feel that her part-time work negatively affects her grades. In fact, Fran shared that working helps to keep her organized, which, in turn, makes her stronger academically. Between our first and second interviews, Fran quit her receptionist job and accepted a Human Resources Internship. Fran is involved with two clubs and other activities on campus, and also coaches high school basketball off-campus.

For Fran, being engaged with the off-campus community meant coaching basketball at her former high school; however, her other commitments (including both work and school) have made it challenging for her to prioritize this engagement:

This year I haven’t been dedicating a lot of time to coaching just because of school, clubs, and work. So I’ve been trying to go out to their games that I can make, and that’s maybe two to three hours a week. And last year I did more because I, it just worked out better with like practice times and stuff and this year it’s just harder.

Fourteen of the sixteen participants also shared that their commitments (including “school, clubs, and work”) made it difficult to regularly engage in structured, off-campus activities. Holly was able to coach an off-campus field hockey team; however, she was the only other participant who made time for this kind of off-campus engagement. The other participants mentioned that they did exercise or socialize off-campus, but they did not
regularly engage with planned off-campus events or activities because of their commitments to academics, work, and on-campus activities.

**The On-Campus Community**

*Lydia is a 19-year-old female who works fifteen hours a week in customer service at a large national retail chain. She feels that this job has had a positive impact on her confidence, her ability to handle herself under pressure, and her ability to communicate with difficult people. She feels that work has had no impact on her academics and her GPA has remained constant since she started working. Lydia enjoys working and values the relationships that she has fostered with her co-workers. She is considering approaching her employer to create her own co-operative education experience in the human resources department of the company where she works. While she does feel like her job has provided her with some foundational skills, she also feels that she is missing opportunities for networking and building skills directly related to her field of study (Human Resources). Lydia is active on campus and considers this engagement to be a very important part of her university education.*

Lydia was a general member of four clubs on campus. She shared that she would have enjoyed attending even more club events and activities as a way of furthering her connections at SFU, but she frequently found that her work schedule got in the way: “I know Beedie has a bunch of networking events like the BASS banquet (Business Administration Student Society), I think. And like I’m working that day. And I’d love to go to those sort of things.” Her busy schedule had also impacted her standing within clubs because she was unable to attend the club orientation, she had to join the Beedie clubs as a general member, rather than as an executive.

Several of the participants identified clubs as being an important part of university life, and a great way to meet people and build skills. Many participants shared that staff and faculty had encouraged them to network and get involved on campus, which may account for the fact that all sixteen of the participants talked about Beedie student clubs in their interviews, referencing them in relation to on-campus engagement. However, ten of the participants explained that their part-time work was impacting their ability to participate in clubs and get involved with the campus in the way they wanted. Some were simply not able to participate, while others found that they were able to be involved, but not in the ways or to the degree that they may have wished.
Angela recognized the importance of being involved on campus. She knew she should be more involved, but when asked why she wasn’t more active on campus, she responded that,

For sports, I don’t really like sports, and I don’t think I have the time. And then for clubs, the club meetings don’t fit into my schedule. And I would rather not go up to campus separately for short club meeting, and also...I always think, ‘Oh, I’ll do it next time.’

During the twelve weeks between the first and second interview, Angela’s interest in on-campus involvement grew, and she felt that, with changes to her work schedule, she could become more engaged. She explained,

But I feel like I should start being involved on campus...well my friend also wanted to be more involved on campus and also my instructor told me it’s good to be more involved on campus. But if I work less and work it around my schedule, it could happen. Because I know some club meetings would be either during work time or class time, but then there are a lot of clubs, so it should work.

In my first interview with Isabel, she shared that working impacted her ability to engage with the on-campus community, particularly when it came to planning her work and academic schedules. She felt that working fifteen hours a week made it difficult to commit to a club. In her words,

I feel like it’s kind of hard to do that because you have to think about how much time you have to put in at work. So like I guess fifteen hours and then if you join, say a club, like I’m planning to join a [Beedle club]. So I applied for a membership position, and I realized that will take up a lot of time as well. So then you kinda have to figure out, will I have time?

Between the first and second interview, Isabel was able to secure the position with a large international student club on campus. During the first meeting she realized there would be challenges with balancing work and her new club commitment. She explained,

I officially joined last week and new members got all the information and welcomed and everything. So it was kind of overwhelming because they threw all these dates at us like ‘February this is what’s going on, try to attend as much as you could.’ So I already had my work schedule and everything and so I had to kind of get all those shifts covered just cause I didn’t wanna miss all the events since I am new. I wanted to try to make as much as I could early on.
When asked if her new club commitment would mean working less, Isabel responded, “Probably, just because I won’t have as much time to balance all like school, club, and work. Whereas before it was just work and school. So I could kind of work any time I wasn’t at school.”

Bart also found it difficult to balance work and on-campus commitments. Working more than twenty-five hours a week downtown during the summer made it difficult for Bart to attend events on campus, and left him frustrated at times:

I mean if people want to set up events at 11:30 in the morning on a Monday, you’re kind of like well, who the heck’s supposed to be able to go to that except for someone who maybe just studies year round or just [Teacher Assistants] or something. I can’t go to those.

However, Bart still found ways to be involved with on-campus events by attending workshops and employer information sessions that fit into his tight schedule.

**Summary: Engaging with On- and Off-Campus Communities**

Busy work and academic schedules made it difficult for the participants to engage with on- and off-campus communities, yet most of them made time for either one or the other. Engaging with the on-campus community was much more common than participating in organized off-campus events and activities. The most common form of involvement was participation in their home faculty (Beedie) clubs and events. Other activities included volunteering in structured programs and using university facilities to study or socialize with friends.

**Post-Graduation Employability**

The final component of the descriptive model is *Post-Graduation Employability (PGE)*. PGE arose as a common theme in conversations with working students, with some participants linking their reasons for working and the experience gained on the job as contributing to their PGE in a positive manner.

**Relevant Experience**
Betty is a 21-year-old female who works five hours per week and also volunteers on campus. She is a transfer student from a local college and she sees working part-time during her studies as an important way to build her resume and accumulate valuable experience. Betty believes that working will allow her to develop the kinds of skills and abilities that will make her more desirable to co-operative education and post-graduate employers. Working in a box office during large events, she has built a reputation as a reliable, dependable employee, and expects to be promoted to a management position soon.

Betty did not believe that it was sufficient to have an excellent GPA. Instead, she felt that employers were interested in skills, abilities, and experiences that could be developed outside of the classroom and “on the job.” As such, Betty looked to her part-time job, along with her volunteer experiences and co-operative education, as ways to make her more desirable to employers. When asked to explain her reasons for working part-time during her studies, Betty explained that,

Um, honestly, money. And employers like to see that people are not just studying, hanging out, and partying. So I feel like it shows responsibility. I want people – when I apply for co-op, and actual careers, I want them to see that I have been doing something for the last couple of years, and not just having an excellent GPA. I feel like everyone is good in school.

She further explained that her parents were supportive and that she felt that she could ask them for money. However, she couldn’t rely on them to provide her with the kinds of experiences that she felt she would need to accomplish her career goals. In her words,

I don’t know…money for me is not the biggest deal in the world. I can always go to my parents and say, ‘Can I have fifty bucks?’ But the resume stuff you can’t really go to your parents and say, ‘Can you put something on my resume for me?’

Bart also cited the opportunity to gain work experience as a critical part of his decision to maintain a part-time job during his studies:

My first reason would be, the experience that I can gain going into my field. I think covering tuition would be the secondary concern for me. I think that’s one of the main reasons and I think a third reason is just getting my foot in the door, getting into the business world. I mean this wasn’t an intended reason for me, but it’s a reason for me to stay is the position I’m in. I’m working with professionals from many different industries and it’s a really good learning experience for me.

As a bookkeeper at a property management company, Bart felt that working part-time would allow him to graduate debt-free with marketable work experience. During our
interview, I told Bart that more than half of all university students today are working while studying. He responded with the following:

Yeah, I kind of find that statistic alarming, when you look at the other side of that half. You know, nearly 50% of students are not gaining any work experience. That to me just tells me that they’re content with spending a lot of money on a degree, diploma, or program and trying to find some work experience to pay that off. That just is a recipe for debt, and a recipe for not having a very good resume when you graduate.

Bart’s comments concerning his reasons for working and having a strong resume upon graduation, illustrate his both his commitment to building his PGE and his concern for other students who are not.

**Summary: Post Graduation Employability**

Seven of the sixteen participants reported gaining experience as factor in their decision to work part-time during their studies; some of them, like Bart and Betty, saw a direct positive connection between the experience gained through work and their PGE. Others may not have seen a direct connection, or been as intentional as Bart and Betty in seeking out opportunities to build PGE. As will be explored in the next chapter, working does afford students an opportunity to build PGE, which is often seen as desirable by employers.

**Summary of Results**

In this chapter, I shared participants’ stories and experiences of balancing work with academic, social, and extra-curricular commitments to illustrate major themes in this study. I introduced a descriptive model to visually represent and organize these stories into a framework that illustrates the impact of work on the student experience. In the next chapter, I use that descriptive model to further explore the participants’ experiences, present my interpretations of each component of the model, and establish links to the relevant scholarly literature. The following chapter concludes with a series of recommendations for working students, as well as for educators and employers. These
recommendations are based on what I have learned from my study, including my empirical research and my review of the scholarly literature.
Chapter 5. Discussion

Introduction

In this study, I interviewed sixteen students from the Beedie School of Business at Simon Fraser University, who also maintained part-time jobs. The purpose of my research was to better understand the impact of part-time work on the student experience, build upon existing literature, and develop practical guidelines for working students, as well as for educators, and employers. In this chapter, I first re-iterate the research questions that have guided this study and present the research methods that provide the study’s structure. I then discuss my findings and the ways that these findings intersect with relevant pieces of literature. Finally, I make recommendations for working students, as well as educators, and employers and suggest directions for future research.

Summary of the Problem and Methods

A greater proportion of students work while attending university than ever before (Cheng & Alcántara, 2007; Davies, 2000; Dundes & Marx, 2006; Franke, 2003; Häkkinen, 2006; Hasson et al., 2013; Holmes, 2008; Marshall, 2010; Motte & Schwartz, 2009). At the same time, the debate on working part-time while studying continues, with many researchers showcasing negative impacts on students working part-time (Barke et al., 2000; Carney et al., 2005; Curtis & Shani, 2002; Curtis & Williams, 2002; Humphrey, 2006; Metcalf, 2003). In the last 20 years, there has been heightened interest about this topic in the United Kingdom as the educational funding model there has shifted from state to student. Research conducted during this time period suggests that there have been increases in the number of students working part-time, and the number of hours worked per week (Curtis & Nimmer, 1991; Curtis, 2007; Curtis & Shani, 2002; Curtis & Williams, 2002; Davies, 2000; Fallows & Steven, 2000; Greenbank et al., 2009; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006).

A larger proportion are also working in Canada, with statistics suggesting a steady rise over the past thirty-five years (Marshall, 2010; Motte & Schwartz, 2009; Ouellette,
2006). With this increased prevalence of working students comes a need to complement data primarily obtained from surveys with a deep exploration of the working student experience. To accomplish this, I interviewed sixteen business students in an effort to learn more about how working part-time was effecting their studies. The research question that guided this study was:

1. What do students perceive to be the main impact of working part-time while attending university?

I was also interested in four areas that have been associated with “student success”: academic achievement, health, engagement, and skill development (Astin, 1993; Kuh & Schneider, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Four sub-questions that guided my research in these areas included:

1. Academic Success: How do students perceive the impact that working part-time has on their academic experience (study-time, concentration, GPA)?
2. Engagement: What effect does working part-time while studying have on engagement with on- and off-campus communities?
3. Skill Development: What non-academic benefits do students perceive they derive from working part-time, including competencies (skills, knowledge, and attitudes)?
4. Health: What role does part-time work play in perceptions of physical and mental health?

I conducted two interviews with each of the 16 business students who participated in this study. Interviewing each participant twice allowed me to both verify content from the first interview and share emerging themes from other participants. I intentionally selected business students as participants for this research due to the competitive nature of the post-graduation market, and the unique way that their employability was nurtured, encouraged, and supported by the staff and faculty at the Beedie School of Business. The first round of interviews allowed me to get to know the participants using a pre-established
set of questions. The second round of interviews was semi-structured and allowed me to explore themes related to GPA, engagement, skill development and health, or other topics resulting from discussions with participants. I wrote analytic memos at the end of each interview to capture my immediate thoughts and interpretations. These efforts produced 1,097 pages of data and provided me a rich source of stories and experiences describing the working student experience.

Throughout the interview process, I continually refined the interview protocol and adjusted it when needed. For example, questions were added or adjusted to ensure that participants were provided the opportunity to discuss, or elaborate on topics that had arisen in my interviews with other participants. By engaging in early and on-going data analysis, I maintained a high degree of flexibility with unplanned events and content (Charmaz, 2014; Miles et al., 2013; Weiss, 1994). As such, I was constantly looking backward at participant experiences and stories as I was moving forward with my research. As described above in Chapter 3., I utilized the four stage descriptive coding process outlined by Weiss (1994), which included coding, sorting, local and inclusive integration. Codes were primarily deductive in nature, although I remained open to emerging themes and created inductive codes for them accordingly. I coded every page of transcript, and then sorted coded content from the interviews into code specific excerpt files, used to contain excerpts of coded data. In total, I used thirty-seven codes: thirty-two were deductive and pre-dated data collection, and the other five emerged from the interviews. During local integration of the data, I summarized and named excerpt files and selected a range of quotations to represent the meaning of the file. Finally, through inclusive integration, I used laminated cards to represent excerpt files and numerous sketches to visually represent a descriptive model (see Figure 2) outlining what I had heard in the interviews, creating what Weiss (1994) refers to as a “single coherent story” (p. 160).

**Summary of the Results – Key Findings and Implications**

In the next section, I present a summary of the key findings from my study and the relevant research literature. I begin by presenting effects that participants noted occurred immediately as a result of working. For example, balancing work, school and other commitments required managing time on a daily, sometimes hourly basis. This had an
*Immediate* impact on participant time management and skill development. Next, I present the broader impact on grade point average (GPA), health, engagement, and post-graduation employability (PGE). These were factors that did not immediately impact participants, but had *broader* implications. For example, as a result of participants working part-time, some noted that their health, and their ability to engage with the campus community were negatively impacted. Some students also noted that working part-time had a positive impact on their GPAs, a finding in direct contrast with findings such as Svanum and Bigatti (2006), Humphrey (2006), and Callender and Kemp (2000).

**Immediate Impacts of Working: Time Management**

When work and school collide, time is the most easily identifiable casualty; all of the participants in this study reported the significant impact that working part-time while attending school had on their time. Other researchers have noted this relationship as well: in a study of first-year business students in the UK, Watts and Pickering (2002) reported that “Issues of time management arose frequently in these interviews with students saying that their part-time employment had a negative effect on the organization of their academic work and study time” (p.132). In my study, the impact of limited time may not have always been detrimental; indeed, some participants reported that working forced them to be more organized, resulting in improved academic performance. Curtis and Nimmer (1991) posit that work may help students stay on track, “Jobs provide discipline and structure, along with extra income, to the lives of newly independent college freshmen, and may even provide a positive influence on study habits, by forcing students to more carefully budget their free time” (Curtis & Nimmer, 1991, p. 24). In another related study, participants felt that working forced them to be more organized, and that having a job inserted structure into their lives; the result was that they learned how to manage their time more effectively (Cheng & Alcántara, 2007). Some participants in my study also noted improved time management skills and were able to leverage this to minimize the impact of working on their academic performance, either by increasing their efficiency or reducing time for non-essential activities.

Working more meant less free time for the Beedie students involved in this study. Fjortoft (1995) also observed a lack of free time amongst the participants in her study.
and suggests that while working reduces the amount of extra time that students have, they tend to reduce socializing and leisure time rather than study time. This finding is echoed by Cheng and Alcántara (2007), who state: “While researchers may not agree on the impact of work on academic outcomes, our group participants all seem to agree on the impact of work on their social life, i.e. the highest cost of work is free time, sleep time, and time for socializing with friends” (p. 306). Indeed, the impact on academic outcomes for participants in the present study was not uniform, yet all participants shared in some ways that they had adjustments to their schedules to honour their work and academic commitments.

To summarize, participants in the present study shared that working meant less time for other pursuits, and pressured them to be more organized and efficient with the time they had. As students experienced this time crunch, participants reported that their time management skills improved, or that they made adjustments to their work schedules, or extra-curricular activities to account for limited time. In the next section, I review skills and abilities that working students acquired from their jobs.

**Immediate Impacts of Working: Skill Acquisition**

Working part-time while attending school forced participants to be more organized and generally improved their time management skills. Participants also shared that their part-time jobs contributed to the acquisition of skills and abilities in other areas. This skill-acquisition mirrors findings from almost all studies that examine skill development in working students, which generally note a positive correlation between employment and skill development (Curtis & Lucas, 2001; Davies, 2000; Fallows & Steven, 2000; Greenbank et al., 2009; McLaughlin, 1995; Neill et al., 2004; Symes et al., 2000).

All of the Beedie students who I interviewed reported building skills on the job. In some cases these were skills and abilities that they were not learning in the classroom, including customer service, sales, and budget-management skills. Some participants also commented that their interpersonal, written, and oral communication skills were being strengthened through their part-time work. This heightened skillset allowed some students to become stronger academically, and participants reflected that improved interpersonal skills and confidence from their part-time work allowed them to engage
more effectively with difficult group members, ask questions in class, and make connections with other students. Some of the more senior students in the study also noted that building skills on the job, and amassing relevant work experience, enabled them (or would enable them) to be more competitive in the pre- and post-graduation job market. In sum, the students in this study generally felt that they were learning on the job, and were able to clearly articulate the skills and abilities they were acquiring, as well as the relevance that these skills and abilities had for their academic performance.

**Broader Impact of Work - GPA, Health, Campus Engagement, and Post-Graduation Employability**

**GPA**

Studies examining the connection between part-time work and academic success have shown mixed results, with many researchers showcasing negative impacts (Barke et al., 2000; Carney et al., 2005; Curtis & Shani, 2002; Curtis & Williams, 2002; Humphrey, 2006; Metcalf, 2003). However, some of these studies report that, if kept to a manageable level, student employment can have benefits (Curtis & Shani, 2002; Manthei & Gilmore, 2005). For example, students in Dundes and Marx's (2006) study, reported that working for 10-19 hours at a job forced them to become more organized, which may account for their academic superiority as compared to other groups of students in the study who were working either more or fewer hours. Manthei and Gilmore (2005), report similar results,

Working while attending university is not necessarily detrimental to one’s academic activities. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that at modest levels (say below 15 hours per week, though even that level of commitment is an individual manner) work may actually enhance learning and academic success, and increase one’s organization skills and employability. (p. 213)

Recent data from the Canadian University Survey Consortium (2015) shows that 59% of 18,144 graduating students who worked an average of 18 hours per week, felt that work had either a positive impact or no impact on their academic success. However, when the number of hours are taken into account, the data show that students who worked 17
hours a week reported a positive impact on academic success, while students working 25 hours a week reported a very negative impact (Canadian University Survey Consortium, 2015).

My findings suggest that for most of the students interviewed, working part-time did not have a negative impact on GPA. In fact, the majority of students in this study shared that their jobs had either no impact, or a positive impact on their grades by forcing them to be more organized, and/or teaching them skills that made them stronger students. Rather than blaming their part-time work for their academic challenges, the participants were more likely to cite academic course load and difficulty and general time constraints as factors that negatively influenced their academic success. The two students in my study who equated working part-time with lower course grades felt that they didn’t have enough time to put towards studying, and that work was taking valuable time away from studying; with extra time, they felt that their GPAs could have been stronger. These two Beedie students were working more than thirty hours per week, which may have contributed to their perception that their part-time work had a negative impact on their GPAs (Cheng & Alcántara, 2007; Dundes & Marx, 2006; Pascarella, 1998).

In summary, results from this study suggest that it is not just one factor, such as the number of hours worked, that influences GPA. Other factors cited by participants included (but were not limited to) commute time, academic course load, volunteer and family and other extra-curricular commitments, and the number of hours worked per week. In this study, there was no single tipping point for participants, but a balance point determined by contextual factors unique to them.

**Health**

The health of the sixteen Beedie students taking part in this study was impacted in several ways due to their experiences working part-time while studying. When discussing their physical health, the participants either reported no adverse impacts, or indicated that working took time away from exercising, thus impacting their physical health in an indirect, negative manner. A few of the students shared that they were not able to eat healthily because working reduced the time they had for meal preparation because of their work schedules; as a result, they frequently ate unhealthy foods on-campus or at work.
When reflecting on their mental health, participants were more likely to link fatigue and stress to academics, or to feeling pressed for time, than directly to their part-time work. Twelve of the 16 participants reported no direct connection between their jobs and their mental health, with only three students attributing work to higher levels of stress. As with physical health, the students in the study often established only an indirect link between their jobs and their experiences of fatigue and stress, citing lack of time as the direct cause. During certain academically intense times of the semester, stress and anxiety levels increased, but participants attributed this increase to busy work schedules in combination with academic pressure, long commutes, and volunteer commitments. In contrast, some participants in the study cited that their part-time jobs allowed them to take a break from their studies, and that working in a social environment with other students actually served to reduce levels of academic stress. This potential benefit of part-time work is also noted in the literature, with one of Winkler’s (2009) participants stating, “I enjoy this job. I have the possibility to get away from all the stress with examinations. I do my job and then go home. And, I don’t have to bear any responsibility” (p. 131). If stress was a factor for students, participants often attributed it to academic commitments, especially during busy times of the semester; stress was not often directly associated with work, and in some cases, was noted as a stress relief, rather than a stressor.

Despite the relatively minor health impacts reported by the participants in the present study, the darker side of part-time work and health has been documented, with some student workers reporting fatigue, impaired cognitive ability, and increased overall levels of stress (Darmody & Smyth, 2008; Hunt et al., 2004; Neill et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 1999). Working students in other studies have also stated that their part-time jobs negatively impacted their sleep, ability to attend lectures and participate in group work, and in some cases, ability to hand work in on time (Carney et al., 2005; Little, 2002; Metcalf, 2003). Other studies have linked physical and mental health to fatigue, impaired cognitive ability, and increased overall levels of stress (Darmody & Smyth, 2008; Hunt et al., 2004; Neill et al., 2004; Tannock & Flocks, 2003; Taylor et al., 1999). In extreme cases, student workers noted that working high-stress jobs resulted in increases in alcohol consumption as a way to cope (Tannock & Flocks, 2003).

Only one of the Beedie students interviewed for this study reported substantial physical and/or mental health issues stemming from her part-time job. In Tina’s case, the
three-hour return commute and the financial need to work almost thirty hours a week took a toll on her ability to get enough sleep, which resulted in her falling asleep in class. Most of the other students felt that when they needed to put more time into their studies they were able to adjust how much they worked by changing either their work schedules or their jobs. In this way, the participants were able to maintain their mental and physical health while also balancing their academic and work-related commitments. This illustrates, once again, the highly contextual nature of working part-time, and the idiosyncratic manner in which students experience part-time work.

**Engagement**

For the participants in this study, being “engaged” with the campus community meant being active with student clubs and associations, hanging out with friends, and having time to attend professor/teaching assistant office hours. All of the students in the study recognized the importance of being involved with the campus community; however, not all of the participants were able to be involved in the way they wanted. This challenge was more pronounced for participants who worked long hours, lived off campus, and had long commutes. Working part-time also frequently resulted in scheduling conflicts, which inhibited the participants from attending on-campus activities and events.

Three of the students interviewed lived and worked on-campus and they reported the opposite: living on-campus made it much easier to participate in on-campus events and activities because they did not have to commute. Working on-campus allowed for the development of connections with the campus community, not only through work, but also through student clubs, committees, and volunteer programs. For example, Simon worked for the Simon Fraser Student Society, and volunteered as an engagement peer helping international students get involved on campus; Ian sat on three committees, including acting as a student senator. These results suggest that students working off-campus may struggle with making time for on-campus activities, especially when working and commuting long hours. Several of the participants commented that they could not attend non-essential activities on-campus because they could not get the time off work. Lundberg (2004) also notes this challenge for working students, reporting that the number of hours students worked off campus had a negative effect on their engagement with peers and faculty in terms of less peer teaching, less
engagement with peers on non-academic issues, less satisfaction with student relationships, and less frequency of interaction with faculty. (p. 209)

The present study is therefore consistent with existing research in suggesting that working students find it more difficult to be on-campus for non-academic activities, and that the more they work, the more difficult this engagement becomes (Furr & Elling, 2000; Pascarella, 1994). However, despite finding it difficult, many participants still found ways to be engaged, which suggests that the context again must be taken into account; if participants felt that it was important for them to be engaged on campus, they found ways by managing their time more effectively, or reducing activities they perceive to be non-essential.

**Post-Graduation Employability (PGE)**

The students involved in this study were changed in a number of ways by their experiences with part-time work. In some cases, working provided opportunities to build confidence, interpersonal skills, and time management skills. In other cases, working enabled participants to expand their professional networks, and gain relevant work experience related to their fields of study.

Some participants were more aware than others that employers value skills in new employees, and recognize that student employment can be an important source of transferable skills (Little, 2006; Neill et al., 2004). Employers surveyed by Neil et al. (2004) noted that, in some cases, potential hires could compensate for a weaker academic profile by presenting with well-developed skills, and that the presence or absence of part-time work on a candidate’s application could make the difference between being hired and being overlooked. Furthermore, a survey involving over 250 in-depth interviews with strategic and line managers from over ninety organizations found that employers strongly believe that work experience makes a valuable contribution to the development of useful skills, including teamwork, communication and interpersonal skills, as well as an awareness of workplace culture (Harvey et al., 1997). Evidence also suggests that those participating in student employment may obtain post-graduation employment sooner than students who do not work, which may, in part, be due to the skill development that occurs in the workplace (Harvey et al., 1998; Neill et al., 2004). Using data from 74,922 graduates,
Bowes and Harvey (2000) were able to show that graduates from sandwich courses (programs involving one year in a work setting) had higher rates of post-graduation employment (PGE) (69.1 percent) than those who did not (55.3 percent). These studies suggest that employers do value skills learned on the job, and thus students who are able to balance work and academic commitments successfully may be better positioned in the job market than students graduating without these marketable skills.

Many of the participants in this study were able to list the skills they were developing through their work experiences, with a few participants being very explicit in tying skill development to improved PGE. For example, Bart and Betty used “resume building” and linked the experience of working, and the skills developed at work, to better job prospects upon graduation. Simon felt the same way, and shared that he specifically chose a job in retail as it gave him the opportunity to build skills that would benefit him in the future. Bart further reported that working while studying connected him with employed professionals in his field, and provided him with a professional network that would help him post-graduation. For Bart, it was acceptable to earn slightly lower marks in his classes, since working would allow him to graduate debt-free with marketable work experience that would increase his chances of landing a job; he was aware of, and accepting of this trade-off.

**A Descriptive Model Re-visited**

The descriptive model presented in Chapter 4 (Figure 2) visually depicts major themes shared by working students and serves as a basis for my recommendations. In order to build the model, I first used the Weiss (1994) approach to coding as a means of categorizing, organizing, and eventually grouping participant stories together to describe various components of their experiences. I then arranged each theme visually and accounted for the interplay between themes using arrows. It is important to note that the model does not predict what the impact of part-time work will be on a working student, but instead describes the major themes that working students shared, and the interplay between them. These themes and interactions lead to five major conclusions:

1. Where students work and what they learn on the job is impacted by their specific reasons for working. Students’ reasons for working can therefore also
be understood as relevant to the impact that working may have on their GPAs, health, engagement, and post-graduation employability (PGE).

2. Time is a valuable commodity for working students; having a job requires that students learn to manage this resource effectively.

3. The impact that work has on an individual student’s GPA, health, engagement, and PGE will affect how much they work, and how long they stay in a job.

4. Co-workers, supervisors, and parents can play a crucial role in supporting working students.

5. Working while studying affects PGE by improving skills, providing marketable experience, and, in some cases, building a professional network.

These five conclusions serve as the foundation for my recommendations, both for working students themselves, and for those employing, teaching, and/or supporting them. These recommendations, presented in the next section, are based on both my time spent with working students, and my comprehensive review of the relevant scholarly literature.

**Recommendations for Working Students, Educators, and Employers**

A larger of proportion of students are working part-time in order to support their pursuit of higher education, and with this reality comes new challenges, not only for students, but also for employers and educators. The findings of this study, combined with other studies in the field, may serve to provide working students with a list of factors to consider when deciding not only if part-time employment is right for them, but also when selecting the kind of part-time work to pursue. In addition, these findings have implications for educators and employers, both of whom are motivated to retain and support students.

My recommendations are focused on accomplishing two overall purposes: first, to reduce the detrimental impacts that part-time work can have on students and/or on their studies; and ;second, to provide practical recommendations so educators and employers can better support working students and improve positive outcomes that have been shown to be associated with working part-time (Bradley, 2006; Cheng & Alcántara, 2007; Dundes & Marx, 2006; Fjortoft, 1995).
Suggestions for Working Students, or Students Considering Part-time Employment

Finding the ideal job can be complicated due to the large number of personal/academic and workplace factors involved. Students may not realize the extent of these factors, and may be tempted to take the first job that they are offered, or the one with the highest pay. However, students should be encouraged to, if possible, be more selective in their job searches by recognizing the idiosyncratic nature of balancing work and school, and taking into account the range of factors addressed in the following focus questions:

Personal/Academic Factors – Focus Questions:

1. **Academic course load:** How academically challenging will the semester be? Are you taking courses that have a reputation for being challenging? Are you taking more credit hours than usual, or than recommended?

2. **Volunteer and club/association involvement:** How much time will be needed for volunteer and club/association involvement? Are these commitments flexible during times of the semester that are academically busy?

3. **Previous experience balancing work with academics:** Do you have previous experience working while studying? Have you developed the ability to balance work and school commitments? Have you found a system or developed useful techniques that will help you to establish this balance?

4. **Organizational skills:** Do you use a planner to organize your work, as well as your academic and/or social commitments? Do you consider yourself an organized student?

5. **Family:** How much time will you spend on family commitments? Will you be able reduce these commitments during times of the semester that are academically intense?

Workplace Factors – Focus Questions:

1. **Total number of hours worked per week:** How many hours will you be working per week? Will you have control over your hours, and be able to adjust during busy times of the semester?
2. **Flexibility in the role:** Will you be able to plan your work commitments around your academic commitments, or vice versa? Are last minute changes to the work schedule possible?

3. **Shifts:** Will you be working late at night, or early in the morning? Will early or late shifts affect your ability to concentrate in class or on your assignments?

4. **Compensation:** How much money will you be making per hour? How many hours a week will you have to work in order to meet your financial needs?

5. **Location/commute time:** How much time will you spend getting to and from work every week?

6. **Taking work home:** How often will you be required to take work home with you? Will working at home impact your ability to spend time on your academic commitments? Will you be compensated for this time?

7. **Relationship with co-workers:** Who will you be working with? Are they also students? If not, will they understand what it is like for you during busy times of the academic calendar? Will they contribute to, or reduce your overall stress levels?

8. **Relationship with supervisor:** How supportive will your new work supervisor be? Will he/she be understanding during stressful/busy times of the semester, and will there be an opportunity during the interview process to assess this?

9. **Relevance to field of study** – Is the work that you will be doing related to your field of study? Will you be learning things on the job that can be applied in the classroom, and vice versa?

10. **Social aspect** – Will your work environment allow you to make new friends and socialize?

**Recommendations for Students:**

I propose the following five recommendations for working students to consider, so that negative impacts are of working minimized, and positive impacts are maximized.

Recommendation 1: Recognize that time is a valuable, extremely limited resource for working students with many competing commitments including academic, family, social, and other extra-curricular commitments. Be ready to reduce the number of hours students work per week to account for academically challenging semesters, or
semesters when volunteer, club/association involvement, and/or family commitments are particularly demanding. Similarly, during semesters with limited academic and extra-curricular commitments, consider increasing hours worked to develop competencies, strengthen post-graduation employability (PGE), and accrue financial resources.

Recommendation 2: Working students are encouraged to seek out flexible roles that will allow them to make changes to their work schedules, if needed. The participants in this study shared that flexibility was one of the most important factors for a part-time job – the more flexible the role, the greater the ability to accommodate a busy academic schedule. The importance of flexibility was echoed by students in other studies, who noted that it allowed them to plan their work schedules around their academic schedules, and not the other way around (Tannock & Flocks, 2003). Recognize that working students cannot do it all; as they plan their semesters they need to be realistic about what they can accomplish, and how this will be affected by their academic commitments.

Recommendation 3: Learn how to manage time effectively through structured organizers. Students in this study often talked about the need to be very organized in order to successfully work part-time while studying. For example, one participant used a colour-coded day planner to keep her academic, work, and volunteer commitments organized. Remember that working students typically have less time to allocate to academics, socializing, exercise, and sleep; staying organized will help working students meet academic deadlines and balance work and school commitments.

Recommendation 4: If possible, invest time in finding a social and supportive work environment, by asking questions of prospective employers. A supervisor who understands the demands of being a student, and who empathizes with the challenges associated with balancing work and academic commitments may be more likely to be supportive during busy times of the academic year. In addition, working part-time while studying may mean that working students have less time to socialize with friends. Finding a work environment which provides opportunities to socialize may not only enable working students to make new friends, but may also contribute to their overall job satisfaction. Winkler’s (2009) study of working students found that “social aspects were regarded as being most influential on the student’s satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the job” (p.125). Students are encouraged to ask prospective employers questions that will shed light on how the organization will support working students. Does the organization
employ other students? If so, how many and from what institution? Do supervisors have experience managing working students? Answers to these basic questions may assist students in determining if the organization is the right fit.

Recommendation 5: Use the focus questions outlined above to have conversations with parents, friends, and university faculty and staff about plans to work. The idiosyncratic nature of the relationship between working and studying suggests that students can benefit from having conversations about factors unique to them. By using the focus questions noted above as a guideline, a deeper understanding of the factors involved may emerge for students, and a clearer sense of how to proceed with employment plans may unfold.

In summary, my research has shown that it is a combination of factors unique to the individual that affects the working student experience. Because of this reality, working students are encouraged to seek out employment opportunities that will fit with their unique needs. Participants in this study described ideal jobs as being flexible and conveniently close to either campus or home, containing a social element, and having supportive supervisors who recognize the importance of academics.

**Educators**

The reality that the majority of students in Canada now work while studying may mean that educators need to shift their thinking and their practices (Marshall, 2010; Motte & Schwartz, 2009; Ouellette, 2006). The following recommendations are intended to improve the way that educators at the Faculty, Student Affairs, and Senior Administrative levels support working students:

**Instructors/Faculty Level**

1. Invite working students to share their on-the-job experiences in class, in order to help them tie together their roles as employees and students
2. Clearly identify deadlines for assignments, projects, group work, and exams at the beginning of each class (and stick to them) as some working students may need advanced notice (6-8 weeks) to change their work schedules.
3. Recognize that working students may experience higher levels of anxiety than non-working students because they have less time to study, exercise, and sleep.

**Student Affairs Level**
1. Create a list of student-friendly employers who have demonstrated a commitment to creating flexible, supportive workplaces.
2. Ensure that there are ‘working student friendly’ clubs for students who may not be able to dedicate as much time to on-campus activities as non-working students. Ensure that working students are not disadvantaged in the selection of new club members; offer orientation sessions more than once, and at different times and locations to facilitate working student attendance.
3. Consider using mentorship programs, panel presentations, and social media campaigns to tap into and share the experience of senior students who have successfully balanced school with work.
4. Use the focus questions contained in this study to help guide students as they search for and select part-time jobs.

Senior Administrative Level

1. Increase the number of on-campus work opportunities to enable more students to engage with the campus community.
2. Build time management skills into first year courses, or into campus wide new-student orientation programs.
3. Ensure flexibility for working students in the planning of events and course schedules. Recognize that working students may find it difficult to attend an event without advanced notice.
4. Identify high-risk students that need to work more than twenty hours a week and have long commutes and create programs to support them academically, financially, and emotionally.

There are a number of ways that educators can better support working students; however, perhaps the most effective way is for post-secondary institutions to expand on-campus work opportunities for students. Working on-campus greatly improves the convenience for commuting students, may provide opportunities to interact with faculty and staff, and has been shown to contribute positively to a student’s connection with the university community (Astin, 1984; Baran, 2010; Broughton & Otto, 1999; Cheng & Alcántara, 2004; Cheng & Alcántara, 2007; Cheng & Zhao, 2006; Kuh, 1991; Pascarella, 1994). Perhaps a reasonable starting point for post-secondary institutions is to conduct an audit of all on-campus work opportunities available for students to determine how many, and what kind of opportunities are available. This information could form the basis of a one-page handout or web page not only outlining the roles available, but also instructing students on when and how to apply.
Employers

Participants in this study shared many things about their employers. The following recommendations are intended to help employers improve the overall work experience for students. Students who work in a social, flexible, supportive environment where they feel there is a connection between work and school are more likely to be productive, engaged employees, and are less likely to leave (Winkler, 2009).

Creating a student-friendly work environment can be done by improving the flexibility of work schedules, creating a social environment, and strengthening the connection between the workplace and the classroom:

**Flexibility:** Students’ academic demands vary throughout the academic calendar. Because of this variability, students need flexible work schedules, and rate flexibility as one of the most important factors for them in a part-time job. Provide student employees the opportunity to pick their work schedules. Plan for non-student employees to work more, and student employees to work less during busy academic times of the year. Provide an easy way for employees to switch shifts with each other.

**A friendly and social environment:** Establish a mentorship program that pairs experienced student employees with new student hires. Make a point of asking working students about their studies, and be aware that academic stress may peak during certain times of the semester.

**Connecting work and academics:** Provide students with opportunities to participate in internship or co-operative education programs. Invite students to bring their classroom learning into the workplace. Create bridge programs that allow students to move from one role to another (i.e. make lateral moves) within the company. Such lateral movement supports student learning, and may contribute to keeping them engaged in their work.

Employers can play a central role in supporting student workers by simply providing more flexibility in scheduling. This was a highly sought after workplace factor for students, and was appreciated during academically intense times. However, many employers still do not accommodate working student schedules, with only 32% of student respondents in a study by Curtis (2007) stating that their employers were flexible, and allowed them to work fewer hours around examination time.

**Implications for Practice: Rethinking Student Orientation**

Post-secondary institutions have a responsibility to support working students in the best possible ways. This responsibility is heightened as more students take on part-
time work and as students begin to work longer hours than ever before (Marshall, 2010). Student orientation provides an excellent platform from which to inform students, and remind faculty/staff, that the majority of students work part-time while attending higher education, and highlight support services available for working students.

There are several ways that student orientation could be leveraged to draw students’ awareness to the systems and services that are in place at their academic institutions to support them as they juggle school and part-time work. First, orientation mentors could play a key role in helping students who are considering working part-time access relevant resources including on-campus work options, available scholarships and bursaries, and general advice on balancing work and academic commitments. Second, a database of student-friendly, supportive employers could be created, with student representatives from these organizations being invited to campus for orientation. In this way, students employed by these student-friendly employers could share their insights about balancing work and academic commitments. Third, orientation is an excellent opportunity to connect with parents on a number of issues. Helping parents understand that working part-time while studying is now the norm, and that resources are available to assist working students learn how to manage the collision of school and work, could be addressed in parent orientation workshops and/or mail/email campaigns containing the focus questions outlined above. Finally, career centres, whose staff members are often involved in assisting students to find work, could also focus on coaching students to find balance by making them aware of the challenges associated with balancing work and school, by either having conversations with working students, and/or directing them to the appropriate resources. These resources, which may already exist or may need to be developed, could include time management workshops, mentorship programs to pair successful working students with new working students, and information sessions focused on financial support.

Given the complexity of the impact of work on the student experience described in this study, new approaches to student support are required across post-secondary institutions and additional training may be needed for educators to ensure faculty, staff and student mentors/volunteers are capable of having meaningful conversations with students about the challenges and rewards of work. Re-thinking student orientation represents one relatively easy option to send a strong message of support to working students by openly acknowledging that the majority of students will work at some point
during their studies, and highlight the concrete steps that post-secondary institutions are taking to support them.

Suggestions for Future Research

The combination of my empirical research and my comprehensive review of the relevant scholarly literature lead me to suggest three future areas for research. First, a limitation of the current study was that all of the students interviewed were in good academic standing. They had cumulative GPAs that ranged from 2.65 to 3.95, with the average being 3.2. This high level of academic success suggests that these participants have, to varying degrees, already learned how to balance part-time work with academic demands. A future avenue for research is therefore to take a closer look at students who are not effectively balancing work with academics. One possibility would be to duplicate this present study with participants who are on academic probation (GPA < 2.0). Such a study could help to address a gap in the literature by allowing us to better understand the factors which, when combined, may lead to unfavourable results for student employees. Clearly, the challenges that working students experience with work-life balance are more complex than can be accounted for simply by the number of hours worked per week; factors discussed in this study such as commuting times, on-campus versus off-campus employment, and workplace flexibility must all be considered in order to come to a reasonable understanding about students’ part-time work. Conducting research with students who are struggling academically as a sample population would lead to a deeper understanding of why these students are struggling where others are thriving, what factors are influencing their work-school-life balance, and how parents, employers, and educators can offer better support.

A second area for future research is deeper consideration of the role that supervisors play in workplace learning. Students report that they get more out of their experiences in programs where supervisors are more intimately involved in the learning process, such as in highly structured co-operative education programs or formal internships (Bowes & Harvey, 2000; Crebert et al., 2004; Kolb, 1984; Kramer & Usher, 2011; Lundsteen, 2011). For example, in the Leap to Excellence Acceleration Program (LEAP), a Career Services piloted program at Eastern Michigan University paired
twenty-eight workplace supervisors with fifty student employees, supervisors served as mentors to the students, “helping to identify strengths and areas for improvement to assist the student employee to reach the agreed-upon learning outcomes” (Broughton & Otto, 1999, p. 87). Student employees and supervisors in LEAP noted dramatically positive outcomes at the end of the program. In designing the present study, I intentionally excluded students who were working in structured programs, such as co-operative education, internships, or work-study programs. Such programs often incorporate intentional learning outcomes which are agreed to by both the student and the supervisor, and which align with university curriculum and the student’s field of study (Crebert et al., 2004; Little, 2000; Lundsteen, 2011). Including working students from these structured programs in the present study may have skewed the results, as these students may have had additional support by their supervisors and/or university staff members. This extra support may have resulted in more positive outcomes in the areas of academic success, skill acquisition and/or PGE. Further research may seek to address the following questions: If employers incorporated the same principles for their part-time student employees as are intentionally incorporated in co-op experiences, would we see improved on-the-job learning and richer work experiences for students? If so, how would this richer learning experience impact both the student and employer?

A third area for future research is to make use of broad-based, survey type methods to ascertain the prevalence of the personal, academic, and workplace factors identified in this study, as well as to examine significant associations among the sub-factors named here. This approach could be applied either to a large subset of the student population, e.g. all business students, or a sample population representative of all university students. Such a survey would shed light on both the factors that have been identified in the previous scholarly literature as significantly impacting GPA and health (i.e., hours worked per week, location of job, compensation, and alignment of role with area of study) as well as the factors that the current study found to impact the student experience. The additional factors suggested by this study are outlined below in Table 11, and include important constructs such as job flexibility, relationship with supervisor/co-worker, location/commute time, and participant organizational skills.
Table 11: Personal, Academic and Workplace Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal/Academic Factors:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Academic course load</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Volunteer and club/association involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Previous experience balancing work with academics</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Organizational skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Family</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace Factors:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Total number of hours worked per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Flexibility in the role</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Location/commute time</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Taking work home</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Relationship with co-workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Relationship with supervisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Relevance to field of study</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Social aspect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study has identified prominent factors that affect the working student experience, yet more research is needed to determine the overall significance of these factors. Are the personal, academic, and workplace factors identified in this study common only to the sixteen students who participated in this study, or do they point toward a broader trend? Future research which extends to a broader and/or more representative cross-section of students can help to address such questions and to enrich our understanding of the working student experience.

Conclusion

In this study, I focused on how working part-time impacted the lives of undergraduate business students at Simon Fraser University’s Beedie School of Business. As a result of listening to participants describe their experiences, I have a better understanding of the challenges they face. This study furthers our understanding of the impact of work on the student experience by supplementing the primarily survey based
literature with rich, Canadian content. With this understanding comes the need to better support working students, who now make up the majority of undergraduate students.

Findings from this study suggest that there are many more factors than just the number of hours worked per week that have an impact on the working student. Commute times, supportive co-workers and supervisors, the inherent flexibility of the job, as well as academic and extra-curricular demands have all been shown to impact the overall experience of working students, and, as such, these factors need to be taken into consideration not only by working students, but also by their parents, educators, and employers. Working students who are able to develop the necessary competencies, such as excellent organizational and time management skills, and who find roles with supportive co-workers and supervisors, may be able to buffer the impact that the collision of work and academics has on their lives.

In a study of 15,218 Canadian first year university students, the top two motivating factors for attending university in Canada were to get a better job and prepare for a specific job or career (Canadian University Survey Consortium, 2015). With the majority of students now enrolling in post-secondary programs with these intentions, students may be more interested than ever in concurrent programs, or part-time work experiences that make them more marketable upon graduation, and may help them prepare for a specific job. More research into the impact of work on the student experience in Canada will further our knowledge in this area, better inform educators, parents and employers on how to support working students, and ultimately improve the ability of students to successfully balance part-time work and academics.
References


Kinzie, J., Cruce, T., Shoup, R., & Gonyea, R.M. (2006). Connecting the dots: Multifaceted analyses of the relationships between student engagement results from the NSSE, and the institutional practices and conditions that foster student success. Unpublished report, Center for Postsecondary Research, Indiana University, Indiana, USA.


Appendix A: Stage One: Demographics and Nature of Employment

1. Stage One: Demographics and Nature of Employment

   a. Age
   b. Gender
   c. Credits completed
   d. CGPA
   e. Job
      i. # hours worked per week
      ii. Job title
      iii. Location
      iv. Compensation ($ per hour)
      v. Related to field of study
      vi. Tenure in the role
      vii. Other factors that you would associate with the position?
      viii. Words you would use to describe the role?
   f. Place of residence
   g. Place of employment
Appendix B: Recruitment Email and Poster

Recruitment Email and Recruitment Poster

Application Number: 2013s0081

Study Details

Principal Investigator: Howard Outerbridge
Contact email: xxx@sfu.ca

Co-Investigator: Dr. Kris Magnusson, SFU Dean of Education &
Senior Supervisor
Contact email: xxx.xxxxxxxxx@sfu.ca

Investigator Department: SFU Faculty of Education
Study Title: “Students and Work: Profiles of Full-time Students Who Work”

Recruitment Email and Poster Content:

“Students and Work: Profiles of Full-time Students Who Work”

The principal investigator (PI) with support of the Beedie School of Business, is seeking participants who work while attending full-time classes at Beedie. You will be asked questions about your experiences as a full-time student working part-time. This study will be conducted on the Burnaby campus at the Beedie School of Business and will require you to attend two 1 hour interviews approximately 2 weeks apart. Participants will be given a $25 gift card for participating in this study. In order to qualify for this study, you must satisfy the following requirements:

1.) First/Second Year Business students who have completed 30-60 credit hours

2.) Currently working part-time
3.) Enrolled full-time

WHAT: 2 x 60 minute sessions. You will be asked questions about your experiences as a full-time student working part-time.

WHERE: Faculty of Business, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby Campus

WHEN: Jan – April 2014

CONTACT: Principle Investigator: Howie Outerbridge - xxx@sfu.ca

PAYMENT: $25 gift card

If you are interested in participating in this study, please email Howie at xxx@sfu.ca. I will contact you to describe the study in more detail, and determine if you are eligible to participate.
Appendix C: Research Questions and Interview Protocol

Research Questions and Interview Protocol

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Primary Research Questions:

1. What are the experiences of full-time undergraduate business students who work?

2. What do students perceive to be the main impact of working while attending university?

   a. Sub Questions

      i. What are the main reasons for working while studying?

      ii. What perceptions do students have of the impact of working part-time on their academic experience (study time, concentration, grades, etc.)?

      iii. What effect does working while studying have on engaging with the campus community?

      iv. What non-academic benefits do students perceive they derive from working part-time? E.g., competencies – skills, knowledge attitudes

      v. What role does part-time work play in perceptions of physical and mental health?
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: STAGE ONE

Review the study title, and the Principal and Co-Investigators. Review the consent form by explaining major headings; obtain signature and thank individual for agreeing to participate. Provide $25 gift card to participant and a copy of the signed consent.

SCRIPT:

Principal Investigator (PI): "This research project has the following objectives:

1) To gain a better understanding of full-time undergraduate business students who work

2) To deepen our knowledge of how working impacts the full-time student experience

3) To provide insight into future support programs for students who work while studying"

PI: "I'll be asking you a series of questions pertaining to your experiences as a working full-time student. Please feel free to ask for clarification if you are unsure of what I am asking. I am most interested in YOUR experience of working while studying full-time."

Questions:

1. Demographics and Nature of Employment
   a. Age
   b. Gender
   c. Credits completed
   d. Job
      i. # hours worked per week
      ii. Job title
      iii. Compensation ($ per hour)
      iv. Relationship to field of study
      v. Tenure in the role – how long have you/did you work there?
vi. Other jobs also held during your time at SFU

e. Place of residence

f. Place of employment

2. Semi-Structured Interview Questions

g. Characteristics/Profile:

vii. What are your reasons for working?

viii. What’s it like to work while studying full-time?

ix. Have you always worked while studying?

x. How do you balance the demands of school and work?
   1. What are your coping strategies?
   2. What have you found to be difficult?
   3. What have you found to be easy?

h. Academic Progress

xi. How are you doing academically in your program?
   4. What do you estimate your GPA to be?
   5. How is working while studying affecting your academic progress?

xii. What changes, if any, have you noticed to your GPA since you came to SFU?
   6. What would you attribute these changes to?

xiii. What techniques are you utilizing (or not utilizing) to maintain your academic standing?

i. Engagement with the Campus Community

xiv. How important is it to you to engage with the campus community?
xv. What kind of extra-curricular activities are you participating in on campus? Off-campus?

xvi. How do you spend your free time on campus? Off campus?

xvii. How is working while studying affecting your ability to engage with the campus community?

j. Competencies - skills, knowledge and attitudes

xviii. What non-academic benefits do you perceive to derive from working part-time? E.g., competencies – skills, knowledge attitudes

xix. How is working while studying impacting the development of useful skills, knowledge and attitudes?

xx. Are you learning things on the job that you aren’t in your classes?

xxi. How will your work experience be a benefit to you? To your career?

k. Perceptions of Physical and Mental Health

ii. How does part-time work either impair or promote a healthy lifestyle (mental/physical)?

iii. How would you characterize your physical health, mental health

iv. Have you noticed changes since you started working, if so, what do you attribute those changes to?

l. Other factors to explore:

xxii. Overall work environment

1. Supervisor

a. Supervisor – what is he/she like?

i. Supportive, directive, involved?

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2. Physical environment
3. Pace – fast, slow
4. Co-workers
5. Fitting in? Sense of belonging?
   xxiii. How would you describe your current job?
6. Routine
7. Varied
8. Pace: Exciting? Boring?
9. Flexibility
   a. How flexible is your current work schedule
   xxiv. What advice would you give to those just starting their studies and planning to work?

PI: “Thank-you very much for sharing your ideas and experiences around working and studying. Are there any other thoughts that you would like to share at this time? I look forward to seeing you in 2 weeks to review the data from today’s interview.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: STAGE TWO

SCRIPT

PI: “We last spoke about two weeks ago. Since then, have you had any additional thoughts that you would like to share?”

“I’d like to share with you some of the themes I found in your responses, and invite you to comment on them. You might think that I recorded what you intended to say, or you might think that I missed the point, or you might want to expand or clarify something I found. For each one, feel free to comment in whatever way makes sense to you today.”
“In addition to your comments, here are some themes that I am starting to see from other interviews. Do you have any additional thoughts relating to these themes, or what you have shared with as part of this study?”

Thank participant, explain next steps with timing and provide any additional information as needed.
Appendix D: Transcriptionist Consent Form

Transcriptionist Consent Form

Application Number: 2013s0081

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

“Students and Work: Profiles of Full-time Students Who Work”

Principal Investigator: Howard Outerbridge

Contact email: xxxx@sfu.ca

Co- Investigator: Dr. Kris Magnusson, SFU Dean of Education & Senior Supervisor

Contact email: xxxxxxxxxx@sfu.ca

Investigator Department: SFU Faculty of Education

Transcriptionist Consent

I, __________________ hereby agree to perform transcription work with the Principal Investigator of this study realizing the sensitive and confidential nature of student information and content. Under no circumstances will I make contact with any participants, and will communicate exclusively with the Principal Investigator.

In addition, I agree to the following conditions:

1. No copies will be made or retained of any written information pertaining to this study.
2. At the conclusion of this study, all confidential information, including audio, written notes, or transcribed text shall be deleted and/or returned to the Principal Investigator.

3. Confidential information shall not be disclosed to any third party.

I agree to the terms laid out in this agreement, and will take every precaution to safeguard the confidentiality of the study participants.

AGREED AND ACCEPTED BY:

Principal Investigator
Name: ______________________________________
Date: ________________
Title: ____________________________

Date (DD/MM/YYYY)
Appendix E: Participant Consent Form

Simon Fraser University
Simon Fraser University
8888 University Drive
Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6
Web: http://www.educ.sfu.ca

Consent Form

Study Title: “Students and Work: Profiles of Full-time Students Who Work”

Who is conducting this Study?

Principal Investigator: Howard Outerbridge, SFU Faculty of Education, xxx@sfu.ca

Co-Applicant: Dr. Kris Magnusson, SFU Faculty of Education, xxxxxxxxxxxxx@sfu.ca

Investigator Department: SFU Faculty of Education

Supporting Faculty: SFU Faculty of Business Administration - Beedie School of Business

Research collected for this study is a part of an Educational Doctorate. Results of this study will be available to the public. The SFU Beedie School of Business is supporting this research by providing office space for interviews, and providing access to potential participants like you.

Why are we doing this study?

Survey data suggests that in Canada, approximately 50% of students work while studying full-time, typically between 15-20 hours per week. Students report a variety of reasons for working, but that they work mainly to make money to meet monthly expenses, earn extra money for personal spending, and to build skills in a social environment. While many students work while studying, little is known in Canada about how working part-time affects the full-time student.

This research project has the following objectives:

1) To gain a better understanding of full-time undergraduate business students who work
2) To deepen our knowledge of how working impacts the full-time student experience

3) To provide insight into future support programs for students who work while studying

**Your participation is voluntary**

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to the education, employment or other services to which you are entitled or presently receiving.

**How is the study done?**

The study will be conducted at the SFU Beedie School of Business, on the Burnaby Campus. The study will involve two 60-minute interviews during which you will be asked a series of questions about your experiences as a working full-time student. Interviews will be recorded unless you specify otherwise. This information will be coded, and compared to data collected from other student interviews to help us better understand the experience of students who work.

**Is there any way being in this study could be bad for you?**

We do not foresee any risks to you as a result of participating in this study. Some of the questions we ask may seem personal or sensitive. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to.

**What are the benefits of participating?**

There may or may not be direct benefits to you from taking part in this study. However, in the future, others may benefit from what we learn in the study. The aim of this study is to deepen our understanding of the experiences of full-time students. Data collected during this study has the potential to be used to further develop support services and resources for student employees who work while studying.

**Payment**

We will not pay you for the time you take to be in this study. However, you will receive a $25 gift card for your participation. Even if you choose to withdraw from the study, you will still receive your gift card.

**How will your privacy be maintained?**
Your confidentiality will be respected. Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent unless required by law. To protect your privacy, the following steps will be taken:

- You will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study; pseudonyms will be created for each participant.
- A master file that contains a key linking identifying information (names and contact information) to pseudonyms will be created and stored in a separate location from the interview data.
- All of the data from the interviews, including audiotapes and notes, will be stored, analyzed and reported by pseudonym.
- Audio files from the interview will be stored on an external hard drive in a locked cabinet in the Faculty of Business Administration until they are transcribed. The individual transcribing the interview will not have access to your name, and will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.
- Upon completion of the data analysis phase of the research, the audio files and the master file linking contact information to pseudonyms will be destroyed.
- Only the Principal Investigator and the Co-Applicant named in this study below will have access to these materials.

**What if I decide to withdraw my consent to participate?**

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you chose to enter the study and then decide to withdraw at a later time, all data collected about you during your participation in the study will be destroyed.

**Organizational permission**

Permission to conduct this research study has been obtained by the Faculty of Business Administration and by the Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University.

**Study results**

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis. Results may also be presented in academic forums such as public presentations or publication in journal articles or books. If you would like to be invited to hear the results of this study or receive a copy of the findings, please provide your email address in the space provided.

**Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?**

For questions about the study, contact the Principal Investigator: Howard Outerbridge at xxx@xx.xx
Who can you contact if you have any complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experience while participating in this study, you may contact xxxxxxxx, Associate Director, Office of Research Ethics at xxxxx@xxx.xx.

Future use of participant data

Research collected during this study may be used to further develop, or create support services and resources for student employees who are struggling to manage the added challenge of working while studying.

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse participation in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your grades.

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study

________________________________________________________________________

Participant Signature Date (DD/MM/YYYY)

________________________________________________________________________

Printed Name of the Participant signing above

________________________________________________________________________

I would like to receive a copy of the final results - please send to the email address above
## Appendix F: Inductive/Deductive Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Codes</th>
<th>Inductive (I)/ Deductive (D)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32 Deductive</td>
<td>5 Inductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the <strong>experiences</strong> of full time undergraduate business students who work?</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the <strong>main reasons</strong> for working while studying?</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interference with (influence on) Academic Progress</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interference with (influence on) Academic progress - Courses</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty balancing work with School</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy balancing work with school</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies to maintain academic standing</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits to Working</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawbacks to working</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill development</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work making a stronger student</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Learning things on the job not learning in classes)</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work benefiting Career</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging with campus community</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging with off campus community</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Sunday</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Plans</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work and Physical Health</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work and Mental Health</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Search Strategy</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice for New Beedie Students</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commute</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why SFU?</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-workers</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Workers – sense of belonging</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working on Campus</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beedie Environment</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities needed to balance work with school</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Staff/Faculty/ role of University</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics and Health</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Traits</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from Significant other</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in attitudes/beliefs</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-operative Education</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

149
| Parents | I |
## Appendix G: Code Book

Code Book for Pattern Codes (major themes) Displayed in the Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern Code Name (major themes)</th>
<th>Code Overview</th>
<th>Example of Data</th>
<th>Inclusion Criteria: indications the theme exists in the data</th>
<th>Exclusion Criteria</th>
<th>Example of Excluded Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the Job</td>
<td>Description s from participants about the experience of working, the work environment, and the people they worked with. Descriptive codes used to build this pattern code included but were not limited to: Supervisor, Flexibility, Co-workers, Co-Workers – sense of belonging, Working on-campus, Compensati on, and Experience of working while studying.</td>
<td>Participant Interview: Recently he [supervisor] added a security camera right like behind our heads. I’m kind of annoyed with that because he’s been telling us ‘oh, it’s for security reasons’. But it’s pointed right at my computer and it’s not like we really do anything outside of work. So I don’t know why it’s there. And it’s creepy because sometimes he watches it [from home] while we’re working and he’ll [instant message] us</td>
<td>Data were included if it a) described aspects of the work environment and/or b) described the people at work including supervisors and co-workers and/or c) details of the job including compensation, hours, duties, and flexibility of the role/supervisor.</td>
<td>Data were excluded if it was not explicitly linked to the work environment, or if the data were related more closely to another major theme in the study (see criteria outlined below: Work and Academics: Developing Necessary Competencies ). Data were also excluded if the work environment was linked to volunteer work, co-operative education, or any structured work/internship program.</td>
<td>Participant Interview: Well like previously mentioned it’s different skills you learn at work, even though it’s not a lot, and just that the amount of interactio n with people. And multitasking. I don’t think you can learn that on your own as much if you’re just going to school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic: Time: The Collision of Work and School</td>
<td>Description from participants concerning their challenges with managing the collision of work and school.</td>
<td>Participant Interview: I think the difficult thing is how I can fit everything in my schedule. Yeah. Because I don’t what to see things get conflicts to each other so I always need to organize them and see what is available and then I can fit it in.</td>
<td>Data were included if it described the immediate a) challenges of balancing work and school commitments and/or b) conflicting work and school commitments.</td>
<td>Data were excluded if it focused more on competencies that were developed to cope with the collision, rather than the collision itself. (see criteria outlined below: Work and Academics: Developing Necessary Competencies).</td>
<td>Participant Interview: If I am working and going to school then I use like agendas or like my phone schedule. To really remind me when I have to be doing what and what’s, what’s coming up next. So I don’t forget anything cuz it’s really easy to forget when you’re running around places.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Work and Academics: Developing | Description from participants concerning | Participant Interview: Sure. I carry like a planner | Data were included if they a) illustrated learning | Data were excluded if it focused a) more on the | Participant Interview: So I’ve
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Necessary Competencies</th>
<th>strategies they had learned to enable them to survive the demands of both work and academics.</th>
<th>around all the time so I write things constantly. Taking 5 classes and the volunteering and work, there is a lot. So I have to make sure I get my reports done on time, and had to like break everything up, it is just a lot of time spent in the evenings and weekends and time that I have free.</th>
<th>resulting from balancing work and school and/or b) highlighted specific techniques, attitudes, or skills utilized to survive and/or c) pertained to immediate or short-term learning challenges of balancing work and school (see criteria outlined above: Time: The Collision of Work and School) and/or b) on broader/longer term impacts developed over time (e.g. accounting skills impacting GPA in a positive manner over time).</th>
<th>been, I think I’ve been pretty lucky so far but it as long as you stay on top of everything I think that’s the biggest thing, if you’re organized and are just good about your work. It’s not too bad to manage.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive codes used to build this pattern code included but were not limited to:  Strategies to maintain academic standing, Benefits to working, Drawbacks to working, Skill development, Non-academic benefits - work making a stronger student, Work benefiting career, Three traits, Qualities needed to balance work with school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Success</td>
<td>Description of academic success, and how this is being impacted by working.</td>
<td>Participant Interview: I don’t think it affects it really much. It’s, the thing that affects my academics is how many courses I take. And the number of units in that course. So if I take uh, 4 or 3 really tough ones. Then my GPA is stable. Um. And even if I work or, even if I work more or less I feel like it doesn’t affect my GPA.</td>
<td>Data were included if they a) pertained to how work was impacting academic success and/or b) referenced academic success being affected by other factors (such as number of courses being taken) and/or c) included longer term skill development that influenced academic success (e.g. earning accounting skills on the job).</td>
<td>Data were excluded if no reference was made to academic success or GPA, or if academic success was impacted by skill development that occurred immediately and/or within a short term (e.g. learning to be more organized, thus impacting grades in a positive manner).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Description of how working impacted their physical and/or mental health.</td>
<td>Participant Interview: I’d say that sometimes work could put like a bit of stress on you which is to be expected but I’d say for the most part that</td>
<td>Data were included if participants linked working to their physical and/or mental health by referencing topics such as stress levels, eating habits, sleep patterns,</td>
<td>Data were excluded if the participants more clearly linked the impact of work to other pattern codes, such as the immediate/short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement: On and Off Campus</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Participant Interview: Um, but now I’m trying to join some clubs, just so I can get to know more people in my programs, or just in general at SFU, with the same interests. Yeah. I think it is pretty important, like Data were included if they described engaging with the on and/or off campus communities through extra-curricular activities such as sports, clubs, and/or volunteer roles.</td>
<td>Data were excluded if data was more closely linked to with other pattern codes (see criteria outlined below: Post-Graduation Employability).</td>
<td>Participant Interview: Like I’m planning to join, AIESEC [on campus club] . So I applied for a membership position, and I realized my manager I can’t handle it anymore. So I will just like decrease my work load to maybe one day, maybe half a day shift. So in that case I will be more uh able to do my school work. It won’t like uh, really affect my academics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Descriptive codes used to build this pattern code included but were not limited to: Work and physical health, Work and mental health, and Academics and health. | it hasn’t been providing me with any undue amount of stress that I consider like excessive. and general fitness levels. | competencies that they had learned through the collision of work and school, or to strategies they utilized to balance conflicts between school and work (see criteria outlined above: Time: The Collision of Work and School). |  |

| Description: Engagements from participants about how they engaged with the on or off-campus environments. Descriptive codes used to build this pattern |  |  |  |
code included but were not limited to: Engaging with campus community, Engaging with off campus community, Free Sunday

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-Graduation Employability (PGE)</th>
<th>Description s from participants concerning how working part-time impacted their job prospects and/or employability after graduation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Descriptive codes used to build this pattern code included but were not limited to: Benefits to working, Drawbacks to working, Skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant Interview: Well if I didn’t work while I studied I wouldn’t have this internship. And I wouldn’t know, well I wouldn’t have an idea what I want to do now. And when I graduate it’ll be easier to tell like my future employer that I had all these experiences while I was in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data were included if they a) created a connection between working part-time and the participant’s job prospects post-graduation and/or b) if working was contributing to a clearer sense of PGE and/or c) expanded PGE through skill or professional network acquisition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data were excluded if the benefits were more short term, and/or related more to immediate changes in short-term skill development and thus more closely linked to other pattern codes (see criteria outlined above: Academic success).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant Interview: We have a till and you always give the right change and it also helps my memorizin g skills, knowing the task that you have to do and also what customers ordered and also, um, training other people, just work related stuff. That</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support: Parents, Partners, University, Employers, Co-workers</td>
<td>Description of participants about how they were supported in balancing work with their academic commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Interview:</strong> They [parents] are fine with me working and studying. They think it’s great and they also like that</td>
<td><strong>Participant Interview:</strong> I don’t know...money for me is not the biggest deal in the world. I can always go to my parents and say, ‘Can I have fifty bucks?’ But the resume stuff you can’t really go to your parents and say, ‘Can you put something on my resume for me?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data were included if they pertained to being supported by a)</strong> parents or people at home (siblings) and/or b)** partners or friends and/or c)** university faculty or staff and/or d)** people at work including co-workers and supervisors.</td>
<td><strong>Data were excluded if they a)</strong> did not show supportive behaviours or practices and/or b)** participants did not feel supported and/or c)** were more closely associated with other pattern codes (see criteria outlined above: PGE).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Descriptive codes used to build this pattern code included but were not limited to:</strong> Co-operative Education, Supervisor, Co-workers, Co-Workers – sense of belonging, Parents, Support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from Significant other, Influence of Staff/Faculty/role of University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>