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Managing Student Workers More Effectively

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About 71 percent of all college students are employed while completing their undergraduate degrees, according to U.S. Census data[1], and most work for the college they are attending as part of their financial aid packages.

Working on campus helps students pay for their education, and it gives them valuable job experience. What's more, research suggests that on-campus employment has a positive effect on students' academic performance, provided that students work for only a limited number of hours a week. For instance, the National Center for Education Statistics found that students working up to 15 hours weekly have a significantly higher grade point average than students working 16 or more hours, as well as students who don't work at all. Other researchers have found that working on campus strengthens students' engagement with their institution.[2]

While the benefits of student employment are clear, colleges and universities face many challenges in managing their student workers. These include tracking and approving the number of hours that students work, often across multiple jobs and departments, as well as coordinating students' work schedules. And students themselves face obstacles as well, such as balancing their busy schedules and covering their shifts if their plans change at the last minute.

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This white paper examines the challenges involved in managing student workers, and it explores how colleges and universities can solve these challenges in an effective manner—thereby simplifying the processes for all involved.

The Challenges

While colleges and universities face several challenges in managing their student workers, here are four administrative tasks that are particularly troublesome.

Ensuring that students are paid from the correct account

Student workers often are paid from multiple accounts, even if they are employed by the same campus department. For instance, students who qualify for federal financial aid are paid using federal work study dollars instead of department funds. Campus administrators must make sure the hours worked by each student are associated with the proper account.

"A key challenge for us is that students might have different variants of the same job," says Ken Thornton, lead systems administrator for human resources at Temple University. "Say a student works for the Paley Library, which is our main library on campus. There are many students who work the same library job, but those jobs may be tied to different accounts for each student employee on the back end, which could impact how we're paying those students. Are we paying them out of that department's budget? Are we paying them out of federal work study dollars? Are we paying them out of the America Reads grant? We have to make sure we are recording that correctly, so our accounting is accurate."

Making sure that students don't exceed the maximum number of hours they are allowed to work per week

To protect students from overextending themselves and leave them with enough time for their studies, colleges and universities typically set rules governing the maximum number of hours that students can work on campus each week (usually no more than 15—20 hours).

Some institutions apply the same rules for all student workers, while others might have different rules for U.S. and international students, or for students participating in the federal work study program and those who don't. Campus administrators must make sure students aren't exceeding these limits, whatever the limit for a given student might be.

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Accounting for the multiple jobs students might work

Students often hold more than one job on campus. For instance, they might work in the dining hall and also pick up shifts refereeing intramural sports for the athletics department. This increases the factor of difficulty for campus administrators, who must make sure the total number of hours that a student works across multiple jobs does not exceed the maximum allowed for that student in a week.

When students work more than one job, they also have multiple managers who must review and approve the hours they have worked. This can lead to a situation where "there are too many hands in the cookie jar," Thornton says. Getting multiple managers to sign off on multiple timesheets can lead to errors or delays in processing payroll.

Covering students' shifts when their schedule suddenly changes

Students are extraordinarily busy. They have many activities they must balance: classes, schoolwork, study groups, extracurricular activities, and of course their campus jobs. As a result of this constant juggling, student employees often have to miss or reschedule their work shifts—which places a heavy burden on the managers tasked with filling those shifts.

"I don't think campus administrators realize how often students call out of their shifts," says Spencer Madden, a student at Nichols College in Massachusetts.

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When Madden worked as a public safety dispatcher for the college, he would get text messages from fellow employees at least twice a week, asking if he could fill their shifts. "There was constant shift changing as college life caught up with you. It was chaotic at times," he notes.

When students in Madden's department were forced to miss a shift, they were responsible for finding their own replacements. "The managers would help, but the shift had to be covered—and it was in your hands to do so," he explains. "We created a group chat through text messaging among employees, but it was a confusing process."

Spencer's experience is common among student workers, says Jennifer Perkins, an industry consultant for Kronos' higher-education division and former director of external relations for the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education.

"It's a very complicated situation," she says. "I know of several institutions that have multiple full-time employees who do nothing but get on the phone and try to find people to fill shifts, especially for large dining operations or recreational departments."

Not only must managers find workers who are available during the time period in question, but these replacements also must have the necessary experience and qualifications to do the job—and they can't exceed their maximum number of hours worked when taking on another shift.

"Traditionally, managers would have to get on the phone and start dialing, or send out messages to a group of students and hope that one of them will be able to do it," Perkins says. "That takes a lot of time. It's a very scattershot way of doing it. You're throwing a bunch of spaghetti against a wall and hoping something sticks."

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The Solution

With a manual or paper-based timekeeping system, campus administrators don't have easy visibility into the hours that students have worked for each job they hold or their schedule for the week. This can lead to mistakes in limiting the number of hours students work, or in processing payroll—and it can make finding replacements to cover shifts very cumbersome.

An automated student workforce solution provides key insights that a manual solution cannot provide. This simplifies the task of managing student employees and reduces the likelihood of mistakes. For example, administrators can set certain rules in the system, such as the maximum number of hours students can work—and they can receive automated alerts when these thresholds are about to be exceeded.

To be effective, an automated student workforce solution should have the following characteristics:

- A single, unified timecard for each student, complete with all of the hours a student has worked across multiple jobs.

- An easy way for multiple managers to approve the number of hours students have worked— but only for their own campus department.

- Visibility into students' schedules, so managers (and students themselves) can easily see who is available to cover shifts.

- The ability to view and manage all of this activity from any internet-connected device.

Kronos' mobile student workforce solution meets all of these criteria. It's a mobile-friendly, fully automated solution that saves valuable time and improves the entire workforce management process for everyone involved—from students and their managers to payroll and accounting departments.

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How the Kronos Mobile Student Workforce Solution Operates

When student employees are hired, they are added to the system with a certain set of rules (such as how many hours they can work each week) and assigned to the appropriate job and pay code. This ensures they are paid from the correct account. If they already have a job on campus, the new position is identified as a second job, which triggers certain workflows within the system.

As students are beginning or ending their shifts, they can punch in or out directly from their mobile devices. If they have multiple jobs, they'll see a drop-down menu, and they can indicate which of their jobs they are reporting for—so their hours are automatically assigned to the correct account.

Through a special geo-fencing feature, campus administrators can set up a designated perimeter for each job, so that students must be within this perimeter in order to punch in. Whenever students punch in or out, their manager receives an automated notification.

All of the hours that a student works for his or her various jobs are kept on a single electronic timesheet for that student. Having supervisors sign off on students' hours occurs automatically through the software's workflow engine, making sign-off easy for both students and managers. While managers can see all of the hours worked by their employees, they can approve only the hours that students have worked within their department.

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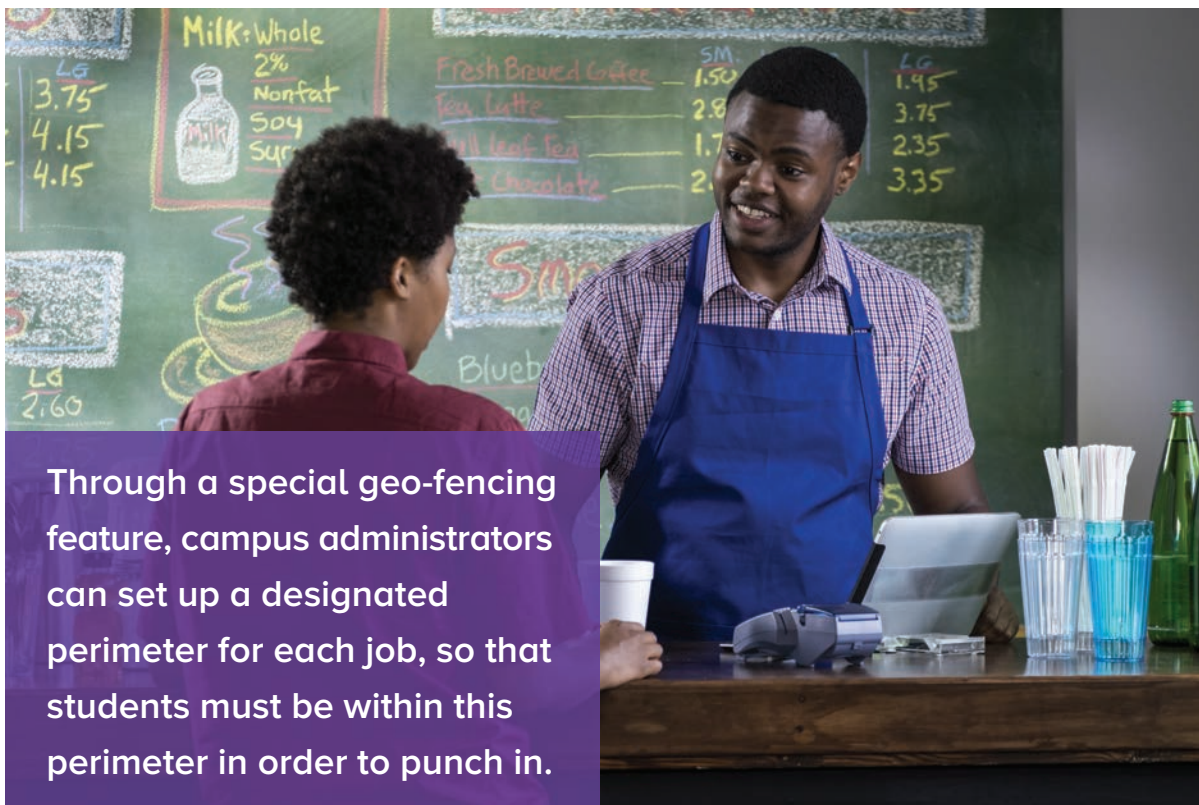
A key advantage to the system is that it's tied directly to students' academic schedules. When managers have to fill a shift on short notice, they can pull up a contact list that includes only those students who are available to fill in during that time period and who have the proper qualifications. The system also helps managers find staff for special, non-recurring events or occasions.

"If I'm managing the dining commons and I have a special event that I'm catering on campus, I can log in and say I need six servers from 3—7 p.m. at Dining Commons A, and the system will automatically send out messages to the people who are available and credentialed to work that shift," Perkins says. "I can add a shift on the fly and have people sign up for it automatically, so I'm not posting a sign-up sheet on a bulletin board in a break room someplace. The solution helps get the right people in the right place at the right time."

> **"By putting the responsibility on the students, campus leaders are empowering them and making them feel comfortable that they have a say over their schedule."**

What's more, it empowers students in ways that aren't possible without an automated solution. The system gives students control over their work schedules, allowing them to keep track of their hours worked, claim open shifts, and find coverage if they can't fulfill a shift—all from the palms of their hands. "By putting the responsibility on the students, campus leaders are empowering them and making them feel comfortable that they have a say over their schedule," Perkins notes.

While scheduling is a significant component of the solution, students also can use their phones to approve the number of hours they have worked each week.

"When students log out of their last shift for the week, the system asks them if their hours are correct. Students can approve their total, or they can send a note to their manager explaining why they think there is a mistake," Perkins says. "Being able to communicate in real time cuts down on payroll having to take care of these issues." In short, she says, the solution "allows students and their managers to interact better—and reduces the time it takes for all of these mass processes."

Temple University Cuts Payroll Reconciliation Time by 66 Percent

Temple University uses Kronos' automated workforce solution to manage all of its employees, including student workers—and the university has seen a significant reduction in the time it takes to process payroll.

"We have student workers across all departments," says Ken Thornton, lead systems administrator for human resources at Temple University. "We have more than 3,000 students working for the university, and collectively they work 4,000 to 5,000 jobs. Students might work as many as four or five different jobs. It's very organic and fluid, with students constantly ending jobs or taking on additional jobs."

Keeping track of so many moving parts used to be quite challenging. Before using Kronos, payroll administrators were spending a great deal of time fixing errors in the number of hours students worked for each job they held on campus.

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"We wanted to get away from making corrections after the fact, once we had processed payroll," Thornton explains. "We wanted to be more proactive, where our timekeepers and student employees have the tools available to them to make those corrections right on the spot." The university now has a single timecard for each student, regardless of how many jobs they might hold. Signing off on the number of hours that students work for each of their jobs is much easier and happens instantaneously through an automated process.

"I hear from our timekeepers all the time. They tell me our new system is a lot simpler and a lot faster," he says. "And on our side, when we're processing payroll, we're able to cut down our reconciliation process to a third of the time it took before—from three hours to maybe an hour, maximum."

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Conclusion

Managing student workers involves many challenges, such as making sure that students are paid from the right account and don't exceed the number of hours they are allowed to work, accounting for the multiple jobs they might work on campus, and covering shifts when their schedules suddenly change.

With a manual timekeeping system, campus administrators don't have the visibility they need to manage these processes effectively and thus are more prone to mistakes. An automated system, such as Kronos' mobile student workforce solution, solves these challenges and simplifies the process for everyone involved—from students and their managers to accounting and payroll staff.

"We have made managing student workers easy and convenient, reducing the burden on both students and administrators," Perkins concludes.

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[1] "Effects of Employment on Student Academic Success." BYU Employment Services, December 2016. Retrieved from **https://www.byu.edu/hr/sites/default/files/effects_of_student_employment.pdf**.

[2] Ibid.

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About Kronos

Kronos is a leading provider of workforce management and human capital management cloud solutions. Tens of thousands of organizations in more than 100 countries—including half of the Fortune 1000® and over 600 K-12 and Higher Education customers—use Kronos every day. Learn more about Kronos industry-specific time and attendance, scheduling, absence management, HR and payroll, hiring, and labor analytics applications at kronos.com.

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