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ACADEMIC PAPER

Hospitality and Tourism Students' Part-time Employment: Patterns, Benefits and Recognition

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Abstract

Part-time working has long been a part of the university student experience, and a variety of studies have examined the extent, reasons and nature of student part-time employment. In return for increasingly necessary financial reward, students provide employers with a flexible and intelligent workforce, and those studying hospitality and tourism management also bring with them a range of skills and knowledge which employers find important and useful. This paper reports on research that develops an understanding of the pattern of part-time working among a cohort of 486 undergraduate students studying hospitality and tourism subjects at an Australian university. This research identifies that the majority (77 per cent) of this cohort of students are involved in some form of part-time employment across a range of industries and on average work 16 hours per week. While the main reasons for working were financial, respondents recognised a range of non-pecuniary benefits accrued from their part-time employment and concluded that their employment did not have a negative effect on their studies. Underpinning this research is the notion that educators are changing their approach to the teaching of practical skills, and the findings from this research indicate that students desire more recognition of their employment commitments through the provision of flexible teaching methods, part-time contacts and formal credit for their experience.

Keywords: Part-time working; Hospitality; Tourism; Students; Skills development

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Introduction

Working part time has long been a part of the university student experience. However, changes that have recently taken place relating to the student funding mechanism have resulted in increasing numbers of students undertaking paid employment during term time (Watts and Pickering, 2000). Although exact numbers of students working part time are difficult to determine with a degree of accuracy, several studies have found that between 50 and 60 per cent of all full-time university students in Western nations currently engage in some form of part-time employment (ABS, 2002; Curtis and Williams, 2002; Lashley, 2005) and that this figure is forecast to grow (Curtis and Lucas, 2001).

University students involved in part-time employment have been the focus of studies in the UK for a number of years (Lucas and Lammont, 1998; Kelly, 1999; Watts and Pickering, 2000; Curtis and Lucas, 2001). This interest is due mainly to the relatively recent demise of means-tested grants, which, to a large extent, provided government funding for university fees. The subsequent introduction of student loans gave rise to concerns regarding student hardship (Curtis and Williams, 2002) and the negative effects on academic progress of full-time students having to engage in part-time employment (Watts and Pickering, 2000). While it is recognised that only a minority of students will begin to pay off students loans while they are still studying, it has been argued that the concept of obtaining debt as a direct consequence of studying will encourage students to become involved in part-time employment (Curtis and Williams, 2002).

Concentrating on students studying hospitality and tourism management at an Australian university, this research aims to determine the extent and type of part-time employment among this group of students. This research also determines the reasons for engaging in part-time employment, identifies both the advantages and disadvantages of engaging in part-time employment while studying, and attempts to solicit an indication of how part-time employment might impact on students' studies. The research concludes with suggestions that allow the main parties involved in student part-time employment to gain maximum benefit from this activity.

While the location of this study is Australia, mention will be made of research addressing part-time employment that has been undertaken on full-time students studying in other Western nations such as the United States and, in particular, the United Kingdom. The following discussion argues for similarities between the Australian and UK education systems and presents several common reasons for the steady increase in the level of part-time employment among full-time students. This approach has been taken for three main reasons. First, the development of programmes, especially in the hospitality and tourism management sphere, has been broadly similar in Australia (Breakey and Craig-Smith, 2007) and the UK (Airey, 2005). Second, government intervention, and particularly the introduction of student fees for higher education, has recently occurred in both countries (see following discussion). This has had the effect of engendering research interest in the topic, resulting in a range of broadly similar studies regarding the impacts of part-time employment on full-time students. Third, the author has extensive experience of working in higher education both in the UK and Australia and has observed the development of hospitality and tourism education over a number of years.

Employment while studying

The concept of domestic students engaged in part-time and sometimes full-time employment while studying is increasingly commonplace in Western nations such as the United States, the UK and Australia. Indeed, Barron (2006) found that almost nine out of ten domestic students studying hospitality and tourism management at an Australian university either worked part time or were actively looking for employment. These findings accord well with Anyanwu (1998), who identified that almost all Australian students work up to 30 hours per week in order to support their studies. In the UK, Watts and Pickering (2000) found that working part time while studying full time was an increasingly common phenomenon among

students, and while there were a variety of positive outcomes of working part time, respondents generally viewed part-time employment as a necessity to survive in the contemporary higher education sphere. Manthei and Gilmore (2005) found that an overwhelming majority of students they surveyed were involved in part-time employment, with eight out of ten students holding at least one job during term time for an average of 14 hours per week. The necessity for part-time employment while studying was emphasised in this study, which found that money earned was typically spent on essential living expenses.

It would appear that students tend to work in industries such as retailing, hotels and restaurants, where the demand for labour has shown steady growth in Western nations (ABS, 2005; IDS, 1999). Employers in these industries need cheap and flexible labour in order to remain viable (Curtis and Lucas, 2001) and students wishing to work part time fulfil this requirement. From the perspective of the student, part-time work is often an introduction to the world of work, and their experiences assist with both personal and career development. However, it has been argued that the world of work should be more closely linked with higher education through formal periods of supervised work experience and more informally through students' part-time experiences (Beard, 1995). When discussing the latter in the UK, the Dearing Report on Higher Education specifically states that higher education institutions should "identify opportunities to increase the extent to which programmes help students to become familiar with work, and help them to reflect on such experience" (Dearing, 1997: Chapter 9, Recommendation 18). In Australia, the publication of Nelson's higher education reforms focused attention on the funding of universities and encouraged both universities and students to view the education process from a more commercial perspective. The underlying thrust behind both of these reports is the requirement for universities and industry to work more closely together as a means of developing a link between students' part-time experiences, their educational experience, careers guidance and, ultimately, employability (Watts and Pickering, 2000).

Demand for students

Curtis and Lucas (2001) contend that employers' demand for students centres around their desire to maximise the management of employment costs. It has been found that students working part time allow employers to manage such costs in three ways. First, they afford employers an opportunity to control wage costs (Walsh, 1990) due to lower levels of pay (Arulampalam and Booth, 1998) and a reduction in employee benefits (McMullen, 1995). Second, students provide employers with a highly flexible workforce (Lucas and Ralston, 1996), which manifests itself in various ways: employers can increase or decrease hours in line with business demands or indeed lay off part-time workers should business be poor; and employers use part-time students to undertake tasks for which they were not originally employed, offering an element of functional flexibility (Lucas, 1997). Finally, it has been found that students working part time bring certain qualities to employment that might be lacking in other employees. For example, Lamont and Lucas (1999) found that employers perceive students to be intelligent, articulate, good communicators, easy to train and willing to follow instructions.

It might be seen, therefore, that full-time students deciding to work part time provide employers with a variety of advantages over other full- and part-time employees. It might be suggested that the advantages these employees bring to the workplace are particularly valuable to the service sector in general, and to the hospitality and tourism industry in particular. The opportunity to control employee costs closely through pay rates and employee levels, coupled with having employees who are able to multitask and bring certain qualities to the workplace, would appear attractive to many employers.

Consequently, the most common source of part-time employment for students is found in the general service industries, with students commonly employed in retailing and within hotel and catering establishments (Curtis and Lucas, 2001; Lashley, 2005). Indeed, in Australia, the ABS (2005) states that 65 per cent of all students working part time were employed in the

retail or hospitality sectors, industries that possess relatively low-entry thresholds and opportunities for unskilled positions (Milman, 1999). It might therefore be suggested that students would be particularly welcomed by the service industry, which is famed for high labour costs and extreme fluctuations in demand. In addition, students provide the service industry, and particularly the hospitality sector, with a ready supply of young employees who assist the industry in portraying a youthful image. Consequently, there is a coincidence of needs: on the one hand, students wishing to work part time enjoy the opportunities afforded to them by the hospitality and tourism industry, while on the other the industry appreciates the flexibility and other benefits students bring to the workplace.

The necessity for part-time employment

The issue of financial necessity has been mentioned elsewhere in this paper, and there is a plethora of research that concludes that students' requirement to contribute to the cost of their higher education has required them to work part time (Sorensen and Winn, 1993; Ford, Bosworth and Wilson, 1995; Callender and Kempson, 1996; Hesketh, 1996; Curtis and Lucas, 2001; ABS, 2002; Curtis and Williams, 2002; Lashley, 2005). However, there are other, perhaps less immediately noticeable, reasons for working part time while studying. Over 20 years ago, Steinberg (1982) found that working while studying quite naturally provides students with an indication of the requirements that will be needed to function effectively in a later career. Specifically, it has been found that students working part time develop team-working, communication, customer care and practical skills (Lucas and Lammont, 1998). The development of these skills appears to be more important for students who are studying a vocationally specific programme, and McKechnie, Hobbs and Lindsay (1999) consider that such students can directly relate the experiences of working part time, which, in turn, enhances and improves their academic knowledge, academic motivation and employment prospects. It might therefore be suggested that students involved in programmes that are vocationally specific and who work part time in the specific industry would, in addition to earning money, experience a range of academic, future career and skill development benefits. Consequently, a number of researchers have concluded that a combination of financial need and the opportunity to gain experience and ultimately enhance career opportunities has prompted students to seek employment during term time in addition to more traditional vacation employment (Harvey *et al.*, 1998; Lucas and Lammont, 1998; Curtis and Lucas, 2001).

Balancing education and part-time work

A variety of studies have examined the impact that part-time employment might have on full-time students' studies. For example, Manthei and Gilmore (2005) considered that working part time left less time than desired for study, and Jogaratnam and Buchanan (2004) found that new students who were balancing a full-time academic load along with a part-time job were likely to suffer from stress. Indeed, it has been suggested that a combination of studying full time, working part time and being in debt can have a detrimental effect on the physical and mental health of students and that the common method of addressing debt (i.e. increasing hours worked) can have a negative effect on academic performance (Carney *et al.*, 2005). Curtis and Shani (2002) determined that those students who worked part time were more likely to miss lectures and felt that they could have achieved higher grades had they not been working. However, in later research, Curtis (2005) found a majority of her (admittedly small) research sample considered there to be wholly positive outcomes of working part time and that there was no conclusive relationship between the students' marks and their perceptions regarding their academic performance.

A clearer appreciation of the extent of students' part-time working commitments is a common finding among research projects, and there is a suggestion that part-time employment is not always detrimental to students' academic efforts, particularly if the hours worked are manageable given their courseload (Manthei and Gilmore, 2005). Several researchers (e.g. Barron, 2006; Curtis, 2005) have argued that universities should be more aware of contemporary student life and introduce an element of flexibility in structuring and submitting

assignments and course requirements to recognise this. This could possibly be achieved through flexible scheduling of class times and offering study support services, especially given the increase in non-traditional students in modern universities (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006).

The above notwithstanding, the issue concerning the impact of part-time work on student performance is relatively under-researched and the effects of part-time working have been viewed from both a positive and negative perspective. From a positive perspective, it has been found that students might acquire personal transferable skills, enhanced employability and increased confidence in the world of work (Watts and Pickering, 2000). From a negative perspective, reporting from a relatively small study in the UK, Lindsey and Paton-Saltzberg (1993) found a majority of their sample worked during term time and concluded that those students who worked part time achieved poorer marks than those who did not. Other identified impacts include missed lectures and tutorials, reduced time for study, and fatigue (Leonard, 1995), and the development of a conflict of interest between employment and academic responsibilities (Watts and Pickering, 2000). However, this conflict of interests does not appear to influence unduly the attitude of academic staff to their students. Curtis found that support for working students is arbitrary and accidental, stating that “[academic] staff were largely unaware of the difficulties students face in juggling their dual roles” (Curtis, 2005: 501). Given that part-time working by students is commonplace, Jogaratnan and Buchanan (2004) consider that universities have a moral requirement to understand and manage more effectively the stressors experienced by students studying full time and working part time.

Hospitality and tourism education and part-time employment

Hospitality and tourism management education has traditionally provided students with a practical element of hands-on experience of operational areas (HEFCE, 1998). This hands-on experience, which provides students with an opportunity to develop skills in the food production and food service areas, is normally undertaken in training kitchens and restaurants, worth academic credit and provided under the guidance of university academic or technical staff. While this element of hospitality and tourism education is still common, Baker *et al.* (1995: 21) opine that “within education, food and beverage practical training has a problem of credibility and cost”. The provision of training kitchens and restaurants is an increasingly expensive exercise, both in terms of staff and facilities. The credibility argument centres around the appropriateness of or need to develop practical skills as part of a management programme taught at university (Ladkin, 2000). Indeed, a range of literature argues for the development of managerial skills, rather than technical or practical skills, as part of a degree programme (Ladkin, 2000; Raybould and Wilkins, 2005).

These factors have resulted in less emphasis being placed on this aspect of hospitality and/or tourism management education, and there is evidence that universities are either contracting out the practical element of their programmes (Baker *et al.*, 1995) or removing it completely from their curricula. However, the development of practical skills, while perhaps enjoying less emphasis as part of hospitality and tourism curricula, is still felt to be important and it is generally felt that graduates should have some experience of the world of work, preferably in the hospitality industry, on graduation (Riley, 2005; Raybould and Wilkins, 2005; Ladkin, 2000; Baker *et al.*, 1995).

Hospitality and tourism management programmes often also require students to undertake a period of work experience in industry as part of their programme (HEFCE, 1998). However, there is no statutory requirement for universities to provide placement programmes. Where placements are a programme requirement, these vary: in length, from six weeks to 12 months; in control, whereby some universities individually place students, while others allow students to find their own placement; and in assessment, where some universities assess individual outcomes where others ask for a reflective piece of assessment based on the

entire placement (Barron, 1997). While there might be similarities in outcome between part-time employment and a period of industrial placement, it is argued that the rationale behind becoming involved in part-time employment is different to that relating to industrial placement. The impact of part-time employment on students' studies has been found to be negative (Watts and Pickering, 2000; Leonard, 1995; Lindsey and Paton-Saltzberg, 1993), while the period of placement can have a wholly positive effect on the overall programme of study (Barron, 1997).

It would seem appropriate for educators and industry to take the opportunity to make the part-time employment opportunity more formal and better controlled, and subsequently to provide students with personal and practical skills that might be useful in their future careers. Following this line, it would appear that advantages might accrue to the three parties involved in the education of hospitality and/or tourism management graduates. First, it has already been argued that the hospitality industry requires a steady supply of young, cheap, flexible and intelligent employees; one might assume that students attending programmes in this area would be most attractive. For hospitality and tourism students, part-time employment in the hospitality industry, in addition to providing reasonably regular work and financial reward, will assist in personal development and the development of contacts that might result in brighter employment prospects in the future. Finally, universities struggling with the debate concerning the cost or validity of practical skills training might be able to take advantage of the synergy that exists as a means of solving these tensions.

It therefore seems timely to consider that the combination of the number of students seeking part-time employment and the various demands placed on higher education institutions to link education with work experience will require universities to manage more carefully their student part-time experiences. Indeed, it might be argued that great opportunities exist for hospitality and tourism educators to develop a model that provides guidance to students on how to maximise their part-time experience, and to employers on how they might utilise the skills of such employees.

Consequently, this research aims to determine the extent and type of part-time employment among a group of students studying hospitality and tourism management at an Australian university. The research aims to determine the reasons for engaging in part-time employment and identifies both the advantages and disadvantages of engaging in such employment while studying. The research concludes with suggestions that allow the main parties involved in student part-time employment to gain maximum benefit from this activity.

Methods

The sample and setting for this research were all undergraduate students enrolled on courses offered by a tourism and hospitality management school at a major Australian university. Based on a detailed literature review, a questionnaire was developed specifically to investigate the extent of part-time employment among the sample and separate questionnaires were devised for students with and without part-time jobs. The first section of each questionnaire asked respondents to answer demographic questions concerning age, gender, nationality and ethnicity. This section also asked questions that attempted to determine motivations for their current area of study and their reasons for choosing their particular programme at the university. The second section consisted of a variety of questions regarding employment, such as: type of organisation; length of service; job title; nature of duties; level of responsibility; and hours worked. The last section contained questions about the benefits of working, their likes and dislikes in their part-time employment, and what they felt might be done to develop the relationship between the parties involved in part-time work. Those students without part-time jobs were asked about their intention to work in the future and different questions were subsequently asked of this group. The majority of questions required a yes/no response but respondents were also presented with the opportunity to provide qualitative comments as a means of elaboration.

In order to achieve a maximum response and to answer questions students may have had during the completion of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was administered in the controlled environment of formal class time and under the supervision of the researcher. The controlled nature of the administration of the questionnaire resulted in a total of 486 usable questionnaires being completed by students studying courses within the tourism and leisure management school. The sample population comprised a majority of students (94 per cent) under 24 years and a majority of females (63 per cent). A t-test was undertaken and no significant difference in part-time employment patterns was found based on gender. Of the 486 completed questionnaires, it was determined that 372 (77 per cent) students in this cohort currently had some form of part-time employment. While mention shall be made of those students without part-time jobs, students currently working are the focus of this paper and results from this group of students shall be discussed in the following section. Initial results indicated that this cohort of students comprised 43 per cent (160) in their first year of study, 23 per cent (86) in their second year and 34 per cent (126) in the final year of their three-year undergraduate degree. No significant differences were found as a consequence of undertaking cross-tabulations as a means to determine the extent of part-time employment dependent on year level.

The data collected from the questionnaire were analysed via SPSS and a range of frequency tables and cross-tabulations were generated, which subsequently allowed the development of bar charts. These charts will be presented in the next section along with a selection of appropriate qualitative responses made by students.

Results and discussion

Those students who were currently working part time were initially asked to provide some background to their employment. The research found that this group of students worked, on average, 16 hours per week. There existed a great variation in the number of hours worked, with 16 per cent of the cohort working less than ten hours per week and 15 per cent working in excess of 26 hours per week. The results from this research would suggest that the proportion of students who are balancing full-time study with some sort of employment is higher than that found in previous studies (e.g. ABS, 2002; Curtis and Williams, 2002; Lashley, 2005). In addition, while this paper has concentrated on those students who are currently working part time, it is important to recognise that, of the 114 students who indicated that they did not currently have part-time employment, 41 stated that they were between jobs and actively looking for part-time employment. This would suggest that, of the 486 students who took part in this research, 85 per cent (413) were either in employment or between jobs and actively looking for part-time work. Given the relatively substantial average number of hours worked and that the average class contact time for such students is approximately 12 hours per week, it might be stated that part-time working is a significant portion of a typical students' weekly activity.

Cross-tabulations were undertaken to determine the nationality of students employed or actively looking for work compared to the nationality of those who indicated that they were not aiming to gain part-time employment. It was found that 85 per cent of home students were either currently in part-time employment or actively looking for work, while only 30 per cent of international students indicated any interest in becoming involved in part-time employment. These findings accord well with Anyanwu (1998) who identified that almost all domestic higher education students in Australia work up to 30 hours per week in order to support their studies compared to less than one in five international students. The difference in employment patterns, argues Anyanwu (1998), is a consequence of the family and social pressure to succeed at their chosen programme and results in international students spending more time and concentrating more effort on study, thus achieving better marks than their domestic counterparts.

Without further research that analyses students' turnover patterns, comments regarding tenure and the reasons for moving jobs or staying with a particular employer are difficult to

articulate. However, when students were then asked to indicate the length of time with their current employer, the results appear polarised. Chart 1 indicates a sizeable proportion of students having either recently started with their current employer or staying with an employer and perhaps demonstrating an element of commitment, at least through tenure, to their employer. It could be argued that these results have significant implications for educators and employers alike. For employers, it could be argued that there are significant benefits to be gained through employees staying longer with the organisation. The recruitment and training costs of replacing employees, along with the potential disruption to service associated with a new employee, could be minimised if employers were able to keep employees for a longer period of time. From the education perspective, it might be argued that the longer a student is employed with an organisation, the more likely the opportunity for the student to gain responsibility, achieve additional work experiences and perhaps to become involved in the organisation at a higher or supervisory level. These aspects of employment that might be a consequence of tenure might emphasise the benefits of part-time employment on the students' studies as identified by McKechnie *et al.* (1999), Lucas and Lammont (1998) and Steinberg (1982).

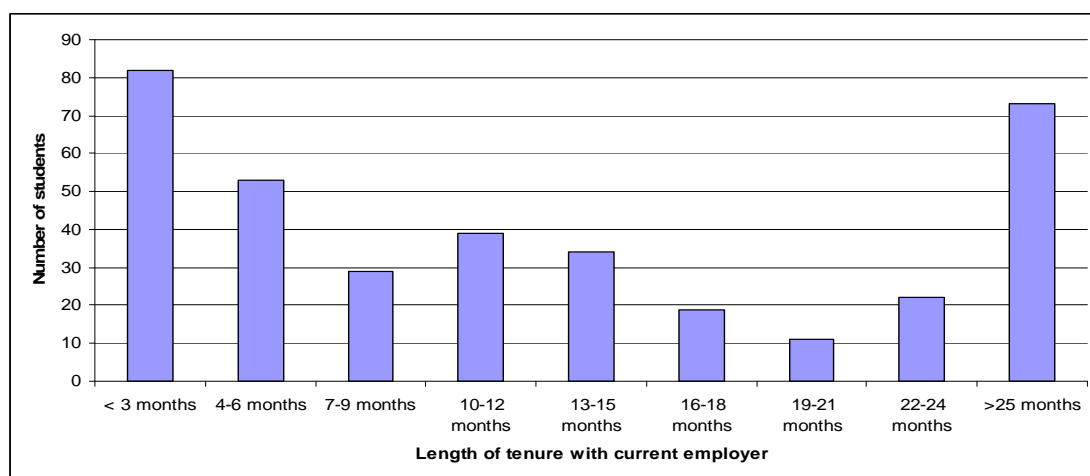


Chart 1: Length of tenure with current employer

As would be expected from this cohort of students, the most common industry sector in which this group worked was identified as what is broadly seen as the hospitality industry. Some 44 per cent (163) of respondents indicated that they were currently employed either in a bar, a restaurant, a coffee shop or a hotel. The second most popular industrial sector for part-time work among these students was the retail industry, with 19 per cent of respondents stating that they were employed in this sector. The remaining students indicated a range of employment opportunities, including working as leisure centre assistants, promotions personnel and administrative assistants. These findings are in agreement with recent Australian statistics that indicate that 65 per cent of students work in these industries (ABS, 2005). However, given this particular cohort, it might have been reasonable to expect a higher proportion of students to have worked in the hospitality industry.

Students were then invited to answer questions on reasons for working and to indicate the best aspects of their part-time employment. While much of the literature suggests there to be a range of reasons why students work while studying, this group of students worked overwhelmingly for financial reasons. Only 7 per cent (26) of respondents suggested that their main reason for working was to gain experience or develop practical skills; the remaining 93 per cent (346) of respondents stated financial rewards as their main reason for working. This finding is in agreement with previous studies undertaken overseas (Sorensen and Winn, 1993; Ford *et al.*, 1995; Callender and Kempson, 1996; Hesketh, 1996; Curtis and Lucas, 2001; Curtis and Williams, 2002; Lashley, 2005) and in Australia (ABS, 2002). However, while financial reward was identified as the best aspect of part-time employment by 25 per cent (93) of respondents, other non-pecuniary benefits were also indicated. Specifically, human interaction was seen as a benefit of part-time work, with 33 per cent

(122) of respondents considering working with colleagues and the public as being the best aspect of their job. In addition, this cohort of students appeared to recognise that working part time provided experience and responsibility while developing technical skills and confidence. Detailed responses to this question are provided in Chart 2.



Chart 2: The best aspect of students' part-time employment

Students were then asked to consider the worst aspect of their part-time employment. This research found that, in general, students felt dissatisfied with two aspects of their employment. First, students appeared to have difficulty with the human element of their employment. The most commonly identified worst aspect of part-time employment was dealing with customers – a worrying finding when one considers the customer intensive nature of the hospitality and tourism industry. However, this finding is reflected in research that examined retail students' experiences in the retail industry (Broadbridge *et al.*, 2006) and hospitality students' experiences while working in the hospitality industry (Barron *et al.*, 2007), where both studies found that dealing with customers was a source of dissatisfaction amongst students. At first glance, this finding appears in direct contrast with the best aspect of their part-time job identified by this group of students. However, on further analysis, it was found that those respondents who had identified 'customers' as a negative aspect of their part-time employment worked in pubs and bars and commonly had to deal with drunk or rowdy patrons. Students also appeared to consider their supervisors from a negative perspective. This attitude was neatly indicated by one respondent, who stated:

My supervisor doesn't seem to care about his staff and personally I feel that he treats me with no respect at all. I've never heard him say 'thank you' at the end of your shift or when you have been busy, in fact he doesn't even say 'hello' when you start your shift.

The other generally negative aspect concerned the work itself. Chart 3 indicates that a proportion of respondents considered their work to be boring, with limited opportunities, and structured so that shift work was necessary. While it is understood that working life, especially regarding service industries, comprises an element of mundane and repetitive work requiring weekend or evening shifts, it is suggested that employers might consider expanding opportunities for part-time employees which, in turn, would go some way to alleviating boredom.

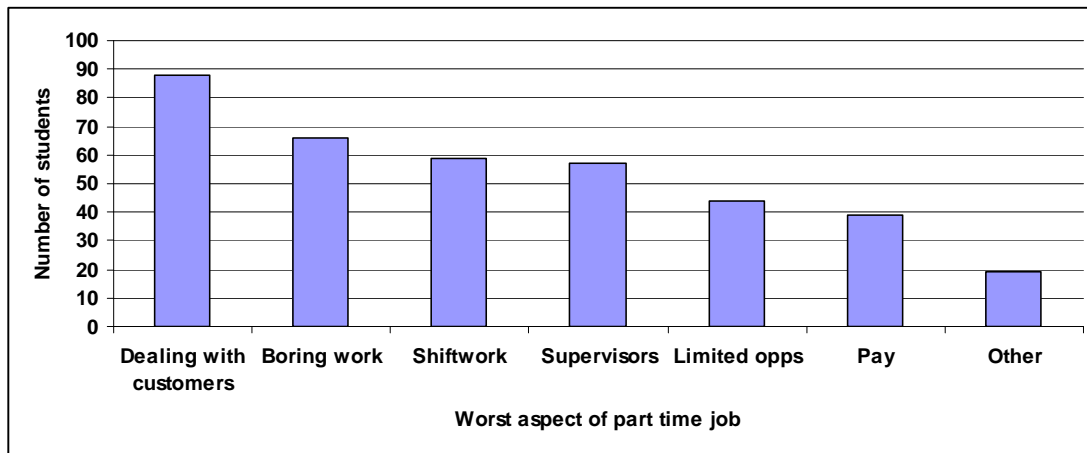


Chart 3: The worst aspect of students' part-time employment

Students were then asked to reflect on the impact their part-time employment had on their studies. It would appear that this cohort of students was reasonably sanguine regarding working while studying, with only 7 per cent (24) considering that their part-time job had a serious negative influence on their studies. This finding questions previous research which indicated that working students placed more emphasis on their part-time job than on their studies (Watts and Pickering, 2000), missed lectures, enjoyed reduced study time (Leonard, 1995) and achieved poorer marks than those students who did not work (Lindsey and Paton-Saltzberg, 1993). However, as can be seen from Chart 4, students were reasonably realistic regarding the impact of their part-time working, with the majority considering that their part-time job influenced their studies, but not seriously. The remaining 26 per cent (97) of respondents felt that their part-time employment did not detract from their studies in any way.

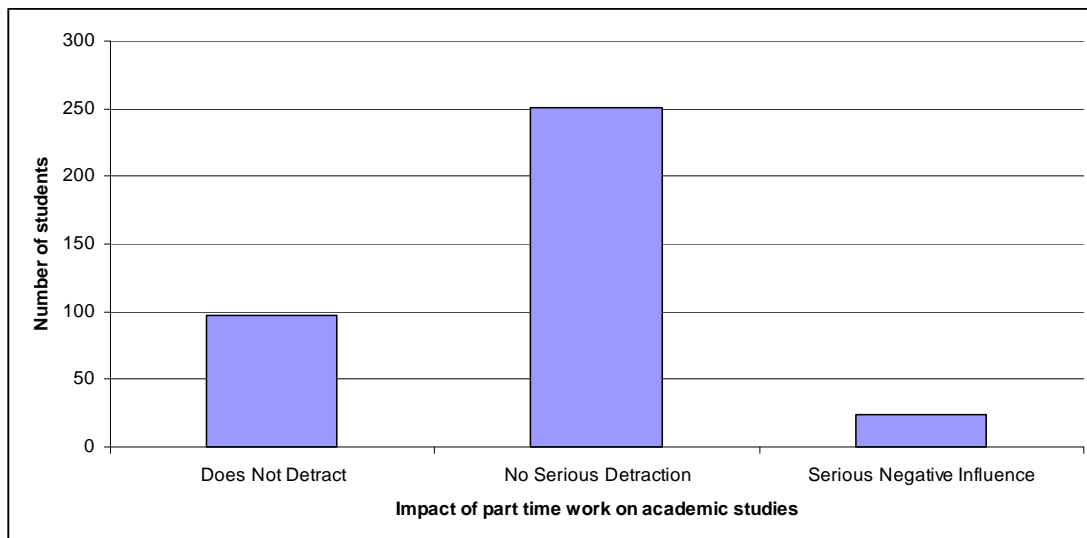


Chart 4: Impact of part-time employment on academic studies

Finally, students were asked how the school and/or university might become more involved in the relationship between the student and the employer. Responses to this question fell into three broad categories. First, the largest number of responses (21 per cent of respondents) concerned increasing the flexibility of course provision. It would appear that students feel restricted by having only one opportunity to study a subject and would prefer the subject to be available at a variety of times and via a variety of methods. This would allow students the opportunity to fit study around work commitments rather than subjects being provided in a limited manner and students having to fit part-time work opportunities around what might be seen as an inflexible subject provision. Comments concerning the university facilitating working patterns by providing greater flexibility in course delivery were typified by one

student who considered that they did not “expect the university to be involved [in the part-time employment process], but [a] more condensed timetable would be most appreciated”.

Another form of flexible provision highlighted by a number of students was a less rigid approach to the submission of assignments. Currently students have to submit assignments physically to the faculty student centre. It was felt that an opportunity to submit electronically would preclude students having to come to university for the sole purpose of submitting an assignment. Indeed, one respondent stated:

Quite often I have had to refuse a shift at work and come all the way into uni to sign off and submit a piece of assessment. This causes hassle and, instead of earning money, I am spending it getting into university. Surely, [the university] could come up with a scheme where we don't have to personally submit every piece of assessment.

Second, students felt that the school and/or university might do more to provide employment opportunities through the development of more links with industry, and consequently to offer practical assistance with finding work. Chart 5 indicates that 18 per cent of respondents felt that the university might assist students in finding work and a further 14 per cent of respondents suggested that the university should develop closer links with industry as a means of providing suitable part-time opportunities. One female student felt that the university should “help students find suitable employment which pays well and doesn't detract from studies”.

Linked closely with this, 8 per cent of respondents felt that the university might become more formally involved in the relationship between the student and the employer. These respondents considered that the university might act as their representative, perhaps as a source of information, ensuring that pay and conditions were fair, or to act on their behalf should disagreements occur between the student and their employer. This point was succinctly articulated by one international student, who stated:

I'm unaware of the pay rates for various jobs in the industry and I feel that I might be taken advantage of. It would be good to know that the university could back me up should I need support.

The third area where students felt there might be more university involvement in their part-time employment was in the general area of formal recognition for part-time employment. Approximately 14 per cent of respondents considered that part-time employment might count as a credit toward their final qualification. One student stated:

I am spending more hours at my part-time job than I do in class and I would really like to have that effort recognised. I don't mind being assessed as long as it counted toward my degree.

The concept of formal recognition for part-time employment by a university needs careful consideration. The management, administration and control of such a scheme would require an investment of human, financial and physical resources by the host university. Issues to be considered include, but would not be restricted to, quality of establishment, position level, hours worked and, perhaps most important, how the part-time employment period might be assessed.

What is clear from the response to this question is that the vast majority of students who took part in this study are keen for the university to become involved in some aspect of their part-time employment – only nine respondents stated they did not feel it necessary for the university to become involved. This clearly indicates an area where the university might provide students with at least an understanding of the requirements of student life and perhaps provide added value as a means of ensuring student satisfaction.

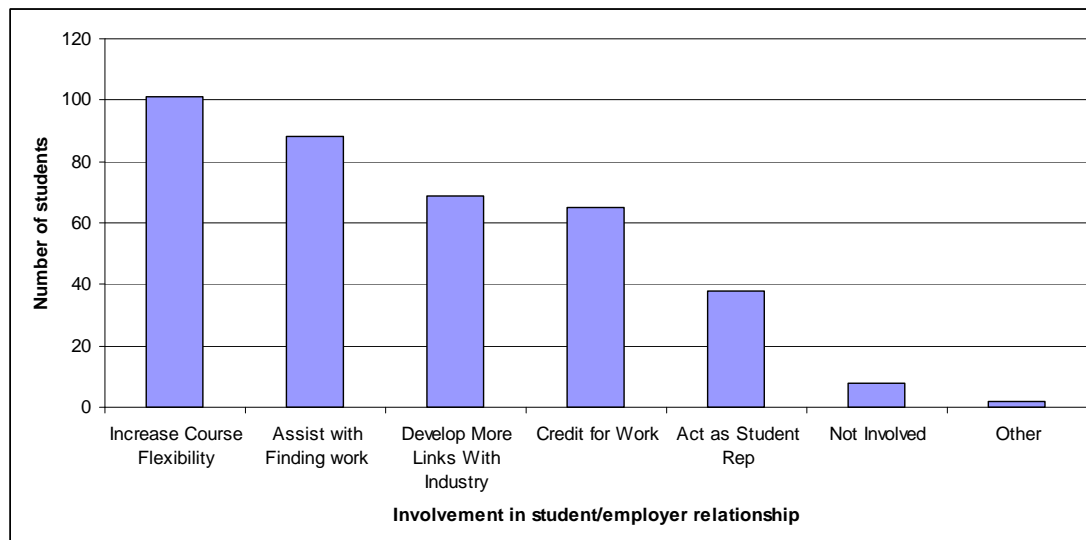


Chart 5: Possible areas of school/university involvement in the student and employer relationship

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to provide an overview of the pattern of part-time working among a cohort of students studying hospitality and tourism management at a major Australian university. These results indicate that the proportion of students undertaking part-time work while studying is higher than previously reported. It is suggested that this involvement with part-time working needs to be acknowledged by academic and administrative staff who might be unaware of the extent and potential influence of their students' working patterns.

Given the need to work and the evident extent of part-time working, it would appear appropriate that more formal involvement on the part of the educational institution should be explored. While effort might be made to provide subjects in a more flexible manner (for example, by providing a choice of delivery times and methods), it might be argued that, for many tourism and hospitality schools, this suggestion would prove costly in both financial and human terms. Clear recommendations are difficult to draw without further research that examines the extent of flexibility required. However, this research has clearly defined the opportunity to submit assignments electronically, and it is contended that ready access to lecture notes would merely require a change in policy without significant cost.

The results of this research would indicate that educators might further recognise part-time working in several ways. First, given the vocational nature of hospitality and tourism programmes, it is not unreasonable for students to have an expectation that the school should have strong links with industry and that the institution might more effectively assist students with locating part-time opportunities. Closely linked with this recommendation is the concept of the institution acting on behalf of and representing the student. The knowledge that the institution might become involved, perhaps in relation to pay disputes, would provide students with added value and a feeling of security in what is normally a tenuous relationship with their employer.

Finally, it is contended that educators have a great opportunity to recognise formally students' experiences as a valuable element of their overall hospitality and tourism management education. This might be done by recognising the number of hours worked, the type of establishment or the position. In addition, and as a means of achieving learning, students wanting credit for part-time working might complete a paper that requires reflective consideration of their experiences and perhaps examines an element of the operation (for example, communication or information technology) that is applicable regardless of length of part-time employment, industry type or perceived quality of the experience. There is an

obvious synergy here between formal periods of industrial placement and students' part-time employment. A university might formalise the part-time employment process along the lines that exist already for industrial placement. Universities might then give students the choice of undertaking an industrial placement or being involved in part-time employment that might result in them being able to complete their programme more quickly. However, further research into the relationship between industrial placement and part-time employment is required and will form the basis for future research projects.

This study has found that part-time employment is a normal element of full-time study in that the majority of students are either engaged in or actively seeking part-time employment. Consequently, it is argued that educators have a responsibility to recognise two aspects of this situation. First, such recognition will ensure that academic staff develop an understanding of the demands placed on students who are studying full time and working part time and take this into account when developing curricula, planning classes and designing assessment. Second, the advantages of experiencing the world of work could be acknowledged and curricula should be sufficiently flexible to provide students who work part time with credit for their experience. Finally, it has been argued that students expect educators to act as their representatives, by sourcing employment opportunities and providing support where needed. Given the increasing cost of higher education, student expectations such as these are not unreasonable. It remains to be seen if universities are willing to respond positively to the realities of student life.

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