

Student Engagement Positively Affects Post-College Employment Outcomes

IRAP researchers presented their latest work on student success at the November 2015 conference of the California Association for Institutional Research (CAIR) – an analysis of the relationship between student engagement and post-college employment outcomes. The full presentation is available [here](#).¹

ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

An extensive body of research has demonstrated the importance of student involvement in academic, civic, and social activities in college in promoting individuals' development and success in college. Until recently, however, little research has explored the relationship between student engagement in college and success in the workforce after graduation. The IRAP research team sought to address this question through combining survey data on student engagement with post-college employment and earnings data.

We used data from the biennial UC Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) to measure students' level of engagement in seven key areas. The employment data are from the California

Areas of engagement in UCUES:

- **Participation in class** (e.g. contribution to class discussion or interaction with faculty)
- **Research** (e.g. independent study or assisting with faculty research)
- **Efforts put toward academics outside of class** (e.g. extensively revising a paper or working with a group of students)
- **Preparedness for class** (e.g. completion of assignments or regular class attendance)
- **Study abroad**
- **Internship**
- **Civic engagement** (e.g. participation in political or advocacy groups, community service, or sports)

Employment Development Department's (EDD), which allow us to observe the earnings and employment industries of alumni working in California.

UCUES contains a battery of questions regarding student participation in academic and other activities. Using factor analysis, we grouped the activities into the seven broad areas of engagement highlighted in the box above.

In order to understand the undergraduate alumni outcomes up to six years after graduation, we studied the respondents to the 2008 UCUES administration, and limited the study population to those who

¹ <http://www.cair.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/474/2015/11/Chang-Getting-Engaged.pdf>

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graduated in the spring term of 2008, 2009, or 2010.

Additionally, we focused on the survey respondents who were “fully employed” - consistently employed in each year after graduation with no graduate school enrollment during that time. This resulted in a study population of over 5,700 students.

FINDINGS

Engagement takes on many forms

UC students have a generally high level of engagement, with participation varying by activity. For example, nearly all respondents (96 percent) reported preparedness for class by turning in assignments on time, and over half (54 percent) reported helping a classmate to better understand course material. Eighteen percent of respondents participated in academic groups or clubs, 16 percent were in an honor society, and 25 percent were members of an off-campus club or organization. About 12 percent of UCUES respondents reported participating in an internship with faculty, and more than a quarter (26 percent) reported working in other internships.

The proportion of students reporting engagement varied little by gender or ethnicity but did increase with class level.

Across all areas of engagement, seniors were the most likely to be engaged during college.

Students' work levels grow with seniority

Seniors had the strongest attachment to the labor force. They were the most likely to work for pay during college and they reported working the most hours while enrolled. Seniors were also the most likely to indicate that their work was related to their academic interests.

Working in a job related to academic interests had little impact on earnings while in college, but a significant impact on earnings after graduation. During college, the wages of students who worked in a job related to their academic interests were comparable to those whose job was unrelated. However, students whose college job was related to their academic interests had higher earnings *after* graduation. They also had a higher likelihood of working in an industry that matched their college major.

On average, students with higher levels of engagement while in college fared better in their initial years of post-college employment. Across all fields of study and engagement types, students with higher levels of engagement had higher average

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earnings during the first six years after college.

We also conducted a more rigorous assessment of the effect of student engagement on post-college earnings. A series of multiple regressions that controlled for engagement type, academic performance in college, major discipline, and demographics showed a significant and positive relationship between engagement and post-graduate earnings. Specifically, our results indicate that students who are more prepared for and regularly attend class, put more effort into academic work outside of class, and participate in internship programs are expected to earn significantly higher salaries in the first six years after graduation.

CONCLUSIONS

Our study revealed four important conclusions about student engagement and its relationship with post-college employment. First, engagement takes on many forms (academic, paid employment, research participation, and civic activities), varies little across demographic group, and increases significantly with class level. Second, in-college employment increases with class level, as does the likelihood of it being related to students' academic

Among all areas of engagement, three emerged as the strongest predictors of both short-term and long-term post-college earnings:

- Efforts put toward academic work
- Internship participation
- Coursework preparation

interests, but in-college earnings vary little with work being related to academic interests. Third, in-college employment related to academic interests is associated with higher post-college earnings and a stronger “match” with industry of employment. Fourth, student engagement in college pays off after graduation – engagement has a significantly positive effect on post-college employment outcomes.

NEXT STEPS

The research team will present the study at the *Undergraduate Education in the Public University Symposium*² at UC Berkeley in March 2016. They will also present at the annual Association for Institutional Research (AIR) conference in May 2016 in New Orleans.

²<http://www.cshe.berkeley.edu/events/undergraduate-education-public-university-symposium>