

IOWA GROW™.

Making Student Employment a “high-impact” activity

The Project:

IOWA GROW™ uses brief, structured conversations between student employees and their supervisors to help make the learning that is occurring through student employment more “visible” to the students. The conversations focus on 4 key questions about what students are learning and how they are applying their learning. Our goals include helping students connect the skills and knowledge they are gaining in the classroom with the work they are doing, and vice versa. This connects to work on high-impact activities – those that require students to reflect on their learning and connect their learning within and beyond the classroom.

The Structure:

We are completing our second year of work on the project. A core team recruits supervisors to participate. So far, we have worked with over 15 supervisors from University Housing and Dining, IMU, University Libraries, and Student Health Service/Health Iowa. During 2010-11 we partnered with the University Libraries to see how the intervention worked in their setting. Supervisors receive one hour of training in:

- Outcomes of student employment
- Results from the Division of Student Life Student Employment Survey
- Background on the role supervisors can play in helping students make connections between work and academics
- Expectations for the Pilot Project

Supervisors are expected to conduct two conversations with their students and submit the responses to the core team for analysis. All supervisors use the same questions for consistency. During our first pilot, we used solely 1:1 conversations. In the second, some departments used small group conversations as these may be more manageable for those employing large numbers of students. Research indicates students may also benefit from hearing other students talk about what they are learning.



IOWA GROW™ students hold a variety of jobs including student custodians, library staff, desk staff in the residence halls, food service workers, tutors, IMU business office employees, and health promotion assistants.

 THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA
Division of Student Life

The Outcomes:

After the interventions were complete, we surveyed both IOWA GROW™ and non-IOWA GROW™ students (out of the student employment pool) about ten different outcomes of student employment. We also asked about specific skills they have learned from their job and how their job contributed to their student success.

Differences are analyzed between IOWA GROW™ and non-IOWA GROW™ participants on both Likert and open-ended responses.

IOWA GROW™ students are **significantly more likely** to agree with the following:

- *My supervisor helps me make connections between my work and my life as a student.**
- *I can see connections between my job and my major/coursework.****
- *My job has helped me develop conflict resolution skills.***
- *My job has helped me use critical thinking skills to form opinions and solve problems. ***
- *My job has helped me improve my written communications. **
- *My job has helped me improve my oral communications.**
- *My job has helped prepare me for the world of full-time employment.**

(*** = significant in both 09-10 and 10-11; ** = significant in 10-11; * = significant in 09-10)

IOWA GROW™ participants were also **more** likely to report that they had these gains from working:

- Forming relationships with other students, faculty, staff
- Feeling they were contributing to their office or the institution
- Learning about themselves
- Gaining work-related knowledge or skills



On the other hand, one of the major benefits non-IOWA GROW™ students saw from student employment was simply making money. These students were also more likely to report they their job did not contribute to their student success and 33% of non-IOWA GROW participants said they “sometimes” or “frequently” had conversations with their supervisors about connecting work to academics, compared with 62% of IOWA GROW™ participants.



Supervisors in IOWA GROW™ also report that the project improved their relationships with their student employees and provided them with valuable information to use in recruiting and retaining student employees. The project was recently featured in a Chronicle of Higher Education article on high-impact educational practices (November 21, 2010).

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Item Responses, Pilot vs. Non-Pilot Students, 2010-2011

Outcome (*=z-test for difference in proportions, significant difference for GROW vs. non-GROW, $p < .05$)	% agree/strongly agree		Mean	
	Pilot Participants	Non-Pilot	Pilot	Non-Pilot
My supervisor helps me make connections between my work and my life as a student.	70%	51%	3.8	3.4
My job has helped prepare me for the world of full-time employment.*	57%	51%	3.6	3.4
My job has helped me improve my written communications.	9%	22%	2.7	2.8
I can see connections between my job and major/coursework.*	68%	36%	3.6	3.0
My job has helped me learn about career options.	31%	39%	3.2	3.2
My job has helped me develop more effective time management skills.	88%	76%	4.0	3.9
My job has helped me improve my oral communication skills.	75%	72%	3.9	3.8
My job has helped me develop conflict resolution skills. *	87%	61%	3.9	3.6
My job has helped me use critical thinking skills to form opinions and solve problems. *	68%	57%	3.8	3.5
Because of my job, I am able to work effectively with individuals with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and cultures.	91%	78%	4.2	4.0

33% of non-pilot participants said they “sometimes” or “frequently” had conversations with their supervisors about connecting work to academics compared with 62% of pilot participants.

Survey response rates:

34% response rate for non-pilot students (617/1817)

49% response rate for pilot students (102/209)

S tudent Employment: Learning by doing

Student employees in the Division of Student Life gain valuable skills that prepare them for the world after college. At the same time, employment during college can actually contribute to student success while they're here – by helping students make meaningful connections between what they're learning in the classroom and what they're learning on the job, we contribute to their overall academic and social success.

Research on student employment shows that students know they are learning many “real world” work skills, such as time management, conflict resolution, and balancing priorities. What they may not connect on their own, however, is their classroom learning and their jobs. While some connections are really natural (e.g., a graphic design major working on the IMU Marketing team), others require a bit more thought and deliberate attention. Supervisors are very important assets in helping students make these connections between “work and school”.

Supervisors regularly check in with student employees on work flow, tasks, and assignments. Taking an extra minute or two to periodically check in on how students are doing in classes, and even asking them to tell you how they can relate what they're learning on the job to course work or vice versa can be all it takes to help get some connections firing.

In the spring of 2009, the Division of Student Life did a pilot survey of student employees and found out some interesting facts. Some won't surprise you – the vast majority of student employees say they've learned important life skills such as time management, cooking, managing finances, using computer software, balancing priorities, working with people from diverse backgrounds, dealing with conflict and learning to work as part of a team from working in our Division. Students also told us they rarely talked with their supervisors about how school was going, or connections they were making between work and academics.

“I have the opportunity to meet and socialize with more people by having my job. My job provided me with a sense of belonging. It gave me a place where I was needed, a place where I was accepted, and a place I was expected to be.”

– A student employee in the Division of Student Life

Four quick questions: Take a few minutes to check in with your student employees using these four easy questions to help them connect work, academics, and their lives beyond college –

- ❖ So, how is this job fitting in with your academics?
- ❖ What are you learning here that's helping you in school?
- ❖ What are you learning in class that you can apply here at work?
- ❖ Can you give me a couple of examples of things you've learned here that you think you'll use in your chosen profession?