

Should University Students Really Have Part-Time Jobs?

by Beth Kobliner

Wendy Mogel, author of *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee* and *The Blessing of a B Minus* (B0 in South Korea)-- and a parenting genius, in my opinion -- says that kids need to have jobs in university.



I get that. When I was in school in the '80s, I had three jobs: I worked the counter at a pharmacy, was the hostess at a diner and waitressed at the local catering hall.

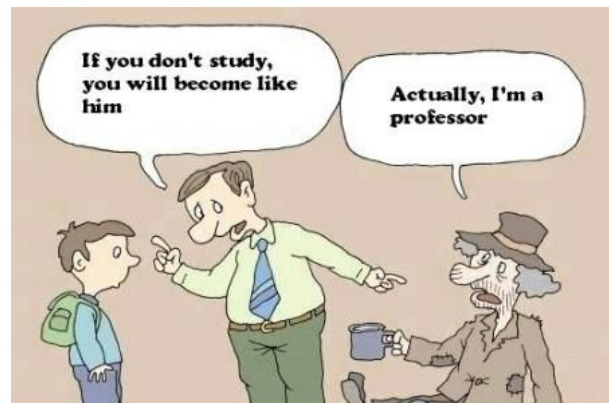
A job was a good thing for several reasons. Besides offering me a chance to make some money for college (in those days, my college ended up costing about \$15,000 a year, so having \$3,000 saved up from working actually did make a difference), working also taught me

life lessons, including how to make change at a cash register. (Calculus honors student that I was, I tried to subtract in my head, which wasn't easy. Instead, my dad taught me to "count up." So if something cost \$3.84, and the customer gave me a ten dollar bill, I added a penny to make 85 cents, a dime and nickel to get to four dollars, and then six more dollars to get to ten. A true life lesson!)

I also have a strong memory of my oldest brother telling us that one of his coworkers, another university kid, was skimming a bit of money out of the cash register each week. That was a totally shocking real world lesson for us -- and one that led to important family talks about ethics and character that I won't ever forget.

So, even though kids are busier these days -- taking more tests and doing more extracurricular activities to get into much more competitive colleges -- a part-time job during the school year should be a no-brainer, right?

I say, wrong. The more I dug into this question, and analyzed the trade-offs, I truly think that the answer for many kids is that *school is their job*.



Time Well Spent: Homework vs. Job

For starters, having a job in university could drop your kid's grades significantly -- from an A0 to a C0, for instance. At least, that's what a [working paper](#) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics suggests.

The study found that kids who held a job while they were in university spent 49 minutes less on homework on the days they worked.



The study explains that other research has found that increasing time spent on homework by just 30 minutes per night improves math grades, for example, by two full grade levels -- so it's clear that an after-school job can hurt academic performance.

If scooping ice cream can get you kicked off the honor roll, it could also, in theory, increase the amount of student debt you are forced to take on.

Work Now, Pay Later?

Here's my thinking: Lower grades usually make it harder to get into top colleges -- particularly those that might have more money to dole out.

Though the Ivy League schools, considered among the most competitive, tend not to offer scholarship money for academic achievement, if you get in and qualify for financial aid, several have the most generous aid packages around.



Some *Ivies (slang for top universities - Ivy League)* have replaced loans with grants in all of their financial aid packages, and even eliminated the amount parents have to contribute if their incomes are below a stipulated income. (At Yale, it's \$65,000; at Harvard, it's \$60,000.)

What's more, there are many highly-rated private colleges that do pay a big chunk of the costs for kids with terrific academic records. And some of the best teaching can be had at public colleges, which often have special discounted scholar programs for great academic performers.

Real World Experience

Not all kids are academic superstars, of course. And I certainly understand the gestalt of Mogel's philosophy: A B0 is a blessing, since it means a kid isn't so narrowly focused on often unattainable goals like perfect 800s on SATs (대학수학능력시험).

This is sound and healthy, for sure. I also agree that kids should be more engaged in the real world, and focus on what really matters outside of their narrow interests and desires.

And, of course, I appreciate the fact that some kids have to work to help support themselves or their families. (Wendy wisely recommends that they try to keep the hours worked under 15 a week.)

However, in the end, I come down on the side of no job during the school year. And though it may be "academically incorrect" to point out, the prestige bestowed by an Ivy League diploma does pay off for many kids.

Economist Alan Krueger's [work](#) shows that students who are black or Hispanic, or whose own parents did not go to college, experience an income boost by attending such top institutions.

Krueger speculates that these very top academic institutions offer kids from less advantaged backgrounds a key into a world of professional contacts that they would not have had otherwise.

Now, I'm all for real jobs in the summer. And I'm an advocate of helping at the local homeless shelter over social action programs in far-off places that cost parents thousands of dollars.



Discussion notes

Due at beginning of class. Your professor will assess the completeness of your notes while you do a warmup activity. **Completeness means: well thought answers** that are relevant to the question being asked; **moderate in length** (neither too short to fully express yourself clearly and give a valuable contribution to the answer nor too long so as to ramble incoherently and go off-task), **neatly written in your own words**, and **not deviating from the answer box** which guides space and frames your answer. (1 point per answer x 5 questions = 5 points possible.)

Q1: The author shares a memory of her brother’s work experience. “I also have a strong memory of my oldest brother telling us that one of his coworkers, another university kid, was skimming a bit of money out of the cash register each week. That was a totally shocking real world lesson for us -- and one that led to important family talks about ethics and character that I won't ever forget.” **Think of a time when you have heard of a dishonest action by anyone. How did it make you feel? What type of lesson did you learn about ethics/ character that have stayed with you until now? Share your memory in the box.**

Q2: The author states her opinion about university students having a job. “So, even though kids are busier these days -- taking more tests and doing more extracurricular activities to get into much more competitive colleges -- a part-time job during the school year should be a no-brainer, right? I say, **wrong**. The more I dug into this question, and analyzed the trade-offs, I truly think that the answer for many kids is that **school is their job.**” **Do you agree? Is university your full time job nowadays? Explain your side logically.**

Q3: Having a job in university could drop student's grades significantly -- from an A0 to a C0, for instance. At least, that's what a working paper from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (in the USA) suggests. The study found that students who held a job while they were in university spent 49 minutes less on homework on the days they worked. **Based on this data and YOUR personal experience, do you believe that having a job can significantly lower your grades? Explain your reasoning carefully and systematically.**

Q4: The author's opinion on grade achievement: "**A B0 is a blessing**, since it means a kid isn't so narrowly focused on often unattainable goals like perfect 800s on SATs," (대학수학능력시험). **Do you agree? Do reasonable (not perfect, now too low) grades reflect better on a student's character, making them more well-rounded/ balanced?**

Q5: The author is not against jobs all the time, she is in favor of summer-time jobs. However she says, "And I'm an advocate of helping at the local homeless shelter over social action programs in far-off places that cost parents thousands of dollars." **What does her statement mean? What type of job does she believe students should have? Do you agree, or do you have another opinion? Elaborate.**

