

THE ANTICIPATED, ACTUAL, AND MISUNDERSTOOD VALUE OF FEDERAL WORK-  
STUDY: A SEQUENTIAL EXPLANATORY MIXED-METHODS STUDY

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

THE ANTICIPATED, ACTUAL, AND MISUNDERSTOOD VALUE OF FEDERAL WORK-STUDY: A SEQUENTIAL EXPLANATORY MIXED-METHODS STUDY

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a candidate for the degree of doctor of education in leadership and policy analysis,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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## DEDICATION

In memory of my wonderful father, Gerald L.T. Wilson, MD. Thank you for being the best father. For years of believing in me, sharing many beautiful and challenging stories with me, listening to my adventures, and always encouraging me to pursue opportunities. I wish you were here to see me reach this milestone.

I would also like to dedicate this to my fantastic mother, Joyce Wilson, sister, D. Leigh Wilson, and my husband, Patrick Keenan, who have been here every step of the way and see me continue to grow and take on new challenges.

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## ABSTRACT

Financial Aid Awards for first-time college students include a variety of offerings, including scholarships, grants, and loans. One award of financial assistance, Federal Work-study, is different from other types of financial aid awarded in that students must work to earn the funds. Yet, it is included as estimated financial assistance (EFA) and fulfills financial need toward covering a student's overall cost of attendance (COA) at a college or university. This study hopes to shed light on why students accept or decline Federal Work-study and their perception of the award regarding the investments they are making in their human capital and any outcomes. This study used a sequential explanatory mixed methods approach from a data set that includes students offered work-study through campus criteria and their actual experiences and perceptions through survey results and follow-up interviews.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Federal work-study (FWS) has been a cornerstone of financial aid awards since 1964. However, few studies identify participants in the program or examine a connection between FWS programs and retention (Berdahl et al., 2011). Overall, there is a lack of research regarding the success of the program and the student FWS experience. More focus is placed on auditing to make sure students are not working during class time than the learning outcomes of the program (Federal Student Aid Handbook, 2019). This paper hopes to illuminate how students view FWS as either being critical to an investment in building their human capital or something that is not considered a vital endeavor based on different personal variables.

On a rudimentary level, the goal of the FWS program, established through the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, is to help students pay for college. However, most FWS jobs are low in pay and do not offset the increasing burden of rising tuition costs (Kenefick, 2015; NASFAA, 2016). Since the monetary benefit of the FWS is often not an amount that would be able to offset a large amount of the cost of college, it seems reasonable that there should be more research available on how students are currently utilizing the program. Given that Becker (1993), via his Human Capital Theory, states, “education and training are the most important investments in human capital,” FWS participation would be an area that should be continually researched and evaluated. This is an award that has the unique ability to create a bridge to education and training. Given proper review and development by financial aid administrators, it can provide not just a monetary benefit to students but also to create a secondary level of training that could enhance the student’s educational experience.

NASFAA (2016) completed a comprehensive literature review and policy analysis of the federal work-study program. A critical finding from NASFAA’s report was the lack of



knowledge about how FWS is applied at institutions and which students are utilizing these awards. This is not a good discovery, as FWS has been part of the federal financial aid program since 1964. However, there is a lack of research and assessment of student recipients' benefits from participating in the program (NASFAA, 2016).

NASFAA (2016, p. 11) identified six deficiencies in the current research regarding FWS:

1. Limited details about the practice of administering FWS
2. Little knowledge about the real-life experiences of FWS students
3. Limited detail about the different types of FWS jobs
4. Limited understanding about the interplay of FWS and other forms of aid
5. Failure to look at the effects of FWS by institutional sector or student background
6. Failure to analyze deeply the impact of FWS on student outcomes

Of these six deficiencies in FWS research, this study will focus on the second deficiency, the lack of knowledge of real-life experiences of FWS students related to participating or declining to participate in the program. The focus of this study is to align data regarding student participation and students' perception of investing in their human capital while navigating FWS. The goal is to create a framework of assessment that colleges can utilize to see if their campus criteria for FWS align with students' needs for personal investment that will benefit them economically post-college.

This paper focuses on answering the following research questions:

1. What factors contribute to an undergraduate student enrolled in a large public university participating in a work-study program, and what are the perceptions of the investment of human capital and outcomes of participants?
2. What factors contribute to an undergraduate student enrolled in a large public university choosing not to participate in a work-study program, and what are the perceptions of possible lack of investment in human capital and outcomes of students who decline to participate?

Currently, the United States Department of Education provides colleges with dedicated federal work-study (FWS) funding for need-based on-campus employment. It has allocated an estimated \$1,143,000,000 for the 2021-22 academic aid years (College Board, 2022). Due to the limited funding available for work-study, colleges must establish campus-based criteria to decide which students receive this funding and an opportunity to work on campus (Kenefick, 2015; NASFAA, 2016). Federal work-study is unique in that the allocation of funds is left to campus criteria and financial aid administrators to determine who will receive this award. Additionally, a certain number of jobs are required for community service-based employment. To receive work-study funding, colleges and universities must submit a Fiscal Operations Report and Application (FISAP) to the U.S. Department of Education every year (NASFAA, 2016).

Historically, three types of financial aid fall under this type of federal awarding structure: FWS, Perkins loans, and the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG). Of these three, only work-study and FSEOG remain, as the Perkins loan program was eliminated during the 2017-2018 aid year. A challenge of administering FWS funds is the low amount each student is awarded due to limited institutional funding. “The number of students who receive aid at a given institution is deficient and, /or their grant award is very small—the average new award in 2011 was \$1,642 compared to \$3,800 for Pell Grants” (Kenefick, 2015, p. 4). The limited amount given to each student can lead to reduced hours that they are available to work at a workplace and make it less desirable to employ work-study students. The limited amount of the award also makes it so that the hourly wage has to be low, so there is enough funds to make the weekly hourly commitment make sense.

The vast majority (82%) of universities and colleges choose to award these funds only to students who have exceptional need (Scott-Clayton, 2011). This limits students who may fall in

the middle and still struggle to pay for college from the opportunity to work on campus. Institutions that receive the most funding are those who have been in the program the longest, which has led to 38% of the funding ending up in the hands of private 4-year colleges, which 46% of college students in the United States attend, where a student may come from a middle-class background but still show a great deal of financial need (Scott-Clayton & Zhou, 2017; Welding, 2022).

It is unlikely that all students who qualify for work-study will be able to participate in the program, as only 16% of public institutions can offer these funds to all eligible students (Scott-Clayton & Minaya, 2014). Students give feedback that they would like more work-study funds and hours (Cheng & Alcántar, 2007). This is not surprising in that 32% of students in college are Pell eligible and have a high need and 31% of students live below federal poverty guidelines for income (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018). Furthermore, 1/3 of work-study jobs are paid at minimum wage, and the FWS jobs that pay more only average 18% over (Scott-Clayton & Minaya, 2014).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is Becker's (1993) Human Capital Theory and how it relates to students choosing to participate or not participate in FWS. The focus of this study explores Becker's (1993) concept that "modern economics assumes that [investments in human capital] are rational responses to a calculus of expected costs and benefits" (p. 17). Education and training are a person's most important investment in increasing their worth, even beyond such givens as family background and talent (Becker, 1993). Education and training can increase a person's socio-economic status, and the decisions that someone makes early on in life significantly impact their future earnings due to the limit of how much a person can work in a lifetime (Mincer, 1974).

Students must decide what time and monetary investments to make to increase their return on investment when attending college (Baker, 2019; Becker, 1993). Students consciously decide to invest their time and money in pursuing a college degree but can sometimes be confused by financial aid offerings on their financial aid awarding letter (Harper, Zhou, & Darolia, 2021). Scholarships and grants reduce the direct costs a student might face and are set up in such a way that students do not have to take a great deal of action to have them apply to their university bill. Students may consciously try to reduce the time they have to work to invest more in their coursework and see scholarships and grants as a means to allow more focus on their studies. A great deal of research also focuses on the impact of accepting student loans and how student debt factors into a student's future earnings (Poplaski, Kemnitz, & Robb, 2019). It is easy to see where one type of financial aid, scholarships and grants, are ideal and student loans are not.

Federal work-study is unlike other types of awards, as students must earn the funds awarded. They must find a job and work the hours to receive a benefit from the award. Depending on where the student is placed for their job assignment, this experience could be rewarding or a waste of the student's time. When thinking about how Human Capital Theory applies to this type of financial aid decision, it requires the student to make many calculations, often before they have even started college and are navigating the sticker shock of attending college (Baker, 2019).

Human Capital Theory is relevant to deciding to participate in FWS since students must consider the cost of participation when making their decision. Are students looking at FWS as something that could be an investment in training or something that is possibly taking away from their investment in education? FWS is an attractive financial aid program to invest in one's

human capital in that it has the potential to create a bridge between education and training while students are in college.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

A common theme in modern research focused on FWS is the connection between work experience on campus and gainful employment. Some legislators have suggested that schools make more of an effort for private partnerships for student work. Past research has stated that many students hope to get practical job experience through work-study, yet earning money tends to be most important to students rather than finding a job that benefits their career path (Yang & Chen, 2013). Participating in a work-study program can help students with job placement and salary after college but may extend their graduation date, thus having a questionable benefit to the student (Häkkinen, 2006). Mincer (1974) might take issue with extending years of schooling, which would reduce a person's estimated working life and possibly extend their estimated retirement age.

There are many conflicting reports regarding the actual value of work-study, and many researchers who have attempted it have found overwhelmingly neutral results at best (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Some of the most coveted on-campus jobs that students reported were research-based positions where they could assist faculty (Cheng & Alcántar, 2007). This further shows that high-achieving students in STEM fields may be aware of the investment in their human capital by seeking out undergraduate research opportunities on campus.

One of the top reasons researchers found that students work on campus is convenience and flexibility. Students who work in campus libraries cited this as one of the top reasons they selected this work location (Benjamin & McDevitt, 2017). If there is not a direct benefit to a student's goals, they may select a location that may at least not hinder their educational pursuits, such as a work site where they can study, or that is conveniently near their classroom destinations.

Another exciting benefit that students noted was initially choosing to work on campus for extra money but then realizing the value of the work experience and that it helped shape their view of their future careers (Cheng & Alcántar, 2007). This on-campus work experience can be precious for low-income students who may be attending college with the hopes of changing their economic path. Alternately, students who come from middle-class or working-class backgrounds are encouraged to attend college by families who are sometimes worried about their student maintaining their socioeconomic status (Silva & Snellman, 2018).

Researchers who have previously evaluated data regarding work-study students have stated that there is a lack of research that combines detailed descriptive statistics and first-hand narratives (Hall, 2010; Riggert, et al., 2006; Scott-Clayton, 2011). Studies that incorporate data from campuses seem not to put forth a full accounting of the movement and placement of the students in work-study positions as related to their area of study (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Thus, case studies and building a more comprehensive library of how current work-study programs are allocated in the United States is essential in evaluating the continued funding and resources allocated to campuses.

NASFAA (2016) identifies four areas that need immediate attention in the area of research on the FWS program: best practices, the experience of work-study students, jobs performed by work-study students, and the success rate for students who utilize FWS. Brittenham (2017) points out a complete lack of resources or understanding regarding what exactly students get out of working during college. Often, it has been looked upon as a burden and an experience reserved for lower SES students. There is a limited amount of research that addresses these best practices and how they are being accomplished on college campuses or if

financial aid offices are even aware of these best practices and applying them when determining campus criteria for eligible work-study recipients.

Work-Study awards are determined by the college or university, with a criterion that also ensures that a certain number of jobs go to community service-based employment; in order to receive work-study funding, colleges and universities must submit a Fiscal Operations Report and Application (FISAP) to the U.S. Department of Education every year (NASFAA, 2016). Since campuses are allowed to decide how to connect students with jobs through awarding formulas developed through campus-specific criteria, there is a lack of consistency in the allocation of work-study dollars, oversight, and program development (Silberman, 1974; Davies & Dougherty, 1989; Rosenthal & Shinebarger, 2010; Zultowski & Catron; 1976).

Scott-Clayton (2011) found that there may also be a gender bias when it comes to the benefit of participating in work-study, where men seem to have more positive outcomes and that participation had little to no impact on academics. They explained possible reasons for this outcome due to the type of work women are offered and the degree of time commitment these jobs may have. Women are doing jobs that require more mental applications, whereas men may have jobs that are more physical but less analytical, such as student recreation centers. Though they also point out that women currently comprise 54% of the current college population.

Positive outcomes that students gain from work-study employment often depend on establishing an understanding between the supervisor and student to create useful feedback loops to assess learning outcomes (Ghant, Horst, & Whetstone, 2016). Having a support system including peers, family, and campus staff to assist working students with creating a balanced approach to work and school (Cinamon, 2018). GPA seems to improve for some 1<sup>st</sup>-year students who participate, and it is still not clear exactly how this program is impacting students since



there have yet to be any strong results one way or the other from current research (Scott-Clayton, 2011).

Half of all college students lack financial support from their families (Duke-Benfield, García, Walizer, & Welton, 2018). It is estimated that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all college students work in some capacity during their undergraduate career, and 20% report working full-time (Ben-Ishai, 2014). Many students are also balancing raising their own family (25%) and attending college, and it has been found that community college students work the most (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018). Interestingly, when reviewing statistical data over the years, 25% of teenagers work during high school, which is a decline from the 50% employed during the 1970s (Carnevale & Smith, 2018; Hotz, Xu, Tienda, & Ahituv, 2002).

This may not be an alarming trend, as the young males in their study benefited more from developing skills through education rather than working (Hotz, Xu, Tienda, & Ahituv, 2002). However, many students are working, and “39% work outside of the service industry, more than half work at the same employer as they had prior to enrolling in college, and 38% report working at a job related to their major field of study” (Ost, Pan & Webber, 2018, p. 1).

Some students struggle with balancing employment and school, especially in getting a proper amount of rest to function well and complete assignments. Due to more rigid schedules of off-campus work, a student may suffer different levels of sleep deprivation throughout the semester due to exam and study requirements that can vary (Bote & Meadows, 2009). Sleeping and socializing were high on their list of tasks that students wished they could do instead of working, and students often sacrifice sleep to work and maintain grades (Cheng & Alcántar, 2007; Lang, 2012). Not having enough downtime can also result in sleep deprivation and symptoms of burnout (Taylor, Snyder, & Lin, 2019).

Students have even reported that working has directed their course selections due to work schedules, and there is a lack of planning that can be done due to hours being posted inconsistently and without advanced notice (Ben-Ishai, 2014). One issue that arises is that students who work off campus are often working at big box stores or food service establishments that are chronically understaffed and present weekly, if not daily, scheduling challenges that lead to stressful environments and meaningless schedules that end up being fluid even if expected work times are posted ahead of time (Tannock & Flocks, 2003). Furthermore, there seems to be a lack of understanding from off campus employers when it comes to scheduling needs of students.

Educators need to be more aware of the accommodations working students may need when it comes to areas such as exam schedules that are outside of scheduled class time (Mounsey, Vandehey, & Diekhoff, 2013). Some working students may take evening classes, which can further bring their post-work stressors into the classroom. Instructors have been known to try creative teaching techniques such as “interactive lecturing,” where student questions would drive the discussion to keep sleepy evening students engaged in the classroom (Stone, 2014).

Off-campus employment seems to be driven by students having to cover basic needs, and offering students a campus-based grant may allow them to work fewer hours (Broton, Goldrick-Rab, & Benson, 2016). It is also possible that more financial aid would influence more students to work on campus and not choose to work more lucrative off-campus jobs. Unfortunately, many state grant or promise programs disproportionately focus on traditional students, who may have more resources than the low-income non-traditional students who are struggling and working the most (Duke-Benfield, García, Walizer, & Welton, 2018). Some of the students who work the

most have been found to have a low level of cultural capital and understanding of the financial aid process and available resources and are sometimes missing out on valuable federal aid and campus-based resources with set deadlines (Ziskin, Fischer, Torres, Pellicciotti, & Player-Sanders, 2014).

Disturbingly, some researchers have found that students may encounter ethical dilemmas at entry-level positions, such as being required to bend the truth in order to sell products or profile customers (Bush, Smith, & Bush, 2013). Some of these ethical dilemmas and workplace issues impacted students emotionally more than any crossover from the pressure of working while in school (Calderwood & Gabriel, 2017). Other studies have shown that stress related to off-campus work situations has more of a negative effect on students rather than on actual hours worked (Creed, French, & Hood, 2014). Work stress also suggests higher instances of anxiety reported by students (Mounsey, Vandehey, & Diekhoff, 2013).

Researchers have found that grades can be negatively impacted if a student works more than 15 hours a week and leads to 47% of these students having a 2.0 GPA or lower (Carnevale & Smith, 2018; Montmarquette, Viennot-Briot & Dagenai, 2007). This is not only an issue in the United States, as Filipino researchers found a significant relationship between a decrease in academic performance and working when studying a group of engineering students (Kurataa, Banob & Matias, 2015). Some studies did not find that grades were significantly impacted by work, but other areas of student life suffer to keep that balance, such as socializing with peers (Lang, 2012; Mounsey et al., 2013).

Students generally have a few options to finance their education through scholarships and need-based grants. Despite increased pressure to move away from student loans, they remain the most readily available funding sources (Berdahl, Gumport, & Altbach, 2011). Federal work-

study is a need-based award that students who meet campus criteria can choose to utilize to help pay expenses while in college. Work-study is an exciting area of study because it is an opportunity to see if students see it as an experience that may bolster their human capital or not. Descriptive statistics alone do not provide a comprehensive view of this decision-making process. Students must participate in describing their thought processes and how this affected program participation.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design**

This study evaluated how incoming freshmen eligible for FWS through campus criteria awarding descriptively differ after accepting or declining this award. Through the descriptive data, the study looks to identify if there are any characteristics that make a student more likely to accept or decline the award. The study was conducted at a large public 4-year university in an education-focused college town that has a population of approximately 123,000, where 94.2% of residents over 25 have a high school diploma or equivalent, and 53% of residents over 25 have a bachelor's degree or advanced degree (United States Census Bureau, 2018). A sequential explanatory mixed methods approach was used to evaluate a group of traditional first-time college students who entered the University during the 2014-15 financial aid year and how their investment in their human capital shaped their decision-making outcomes regarding accepting or declining the award (Creswell, 2013). It employs descriptive data and real-life experiences of FWS students. Quality of employment experience and student outcomes related to this program are essential subjects of this research project. This design was selected to evaluate best who was being offered FWS and how students viewed the value of the award. Cluster analysis was utilized to determine what components of human capital theory the students were applying to make their decisions regarding FWS. Two groups of students were analyzed in the quantitative portion of the study; all were offered work-study through campus criteria selection. One group participated in work-study, and the other did not participate in the program.

Descriptive data on student participation in federal work-study was first reviewed to see if there are any trends in which students accepted or declined the award, which informed the qualitative interview portion of the study (Creswell, 2009). As Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) explain, the quantitative data collected regarding work-study participants helped guide the

interview questions that were developed for the qualitative portion of the research and helped explain students' decision-making about program participation or rejection and the outcomes that have resulted from participation or from pursuing other avenues. I sought to understand how students were choosing whether to participate in FWS and what value in building their human capital they perceived the program to have (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This study presents an understanding of FWS that can be applied to other colleges and universities participating in the Federal Work-study program.

To select participants for this study, purposive sampling was utilized due to the specialized focus of this study on FWS awarding (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The quantitative portion of this study included all 662 incoming freshmen from the 2014-15 aid year who were offered FWS by the University's Student Financial Aid office. The variables requested can be found in Appendix A. These data were requested because it allowed some time for students to be able to reflect on their experiences in their FWS positions and any benefits or outcomes that have resulted from participating. To be eligible for FWS at the institution, the students needed to be Pell Eligible, have completed their FAFSA before the February 1<sup>st</sup> institutional priority deadline, and they must have selected that they are interested in participating in FWS on their FAFSA.

Incoming Freshmen were awarded \$1,200 for their first year of FWS. They were responsible for locating their work-study job by utilizing listings on a university job search website or by approaching individual departments on campus on their own. If a student did not secure employment by the end of September of their first fall term, their work-study award was canceled. In order to meet renewal, a continuing student had to have FWS study during their freshmen year, have a FAFSA Expected Family Contribution amount of up to \$8000, and meet the priority deadline for completing the FAFSA. A student must continue to meet the renewal

requirements to receive the award each year. This was an institutional decision due to limited funding but could be evaluated each year if there was a change in participation or an increase in funding.

All participants of the study were offered work-study through these campus criteria and were initially offered their award through the original financial aid award offer. The students in the quantitative portion of the study are divided into two groups: 1) students who accepted work-study and secured a work-study job, and 2) those who accepted work-study, but did not find a job and thus did not participate in FWS, or who declined the award. While causal associations are not possible, the current lack of any information about FWS participants indicates that this descriptive information is needed and valuable. Due to the number of students contained in the files, I was able to make sure that there was no identifying information that would single out a student; special care was taken in classifying jobs in a way that would connect a student to their actual workplace on campus by only using job classification codes (Creswell, 2014). Descriptive statistics were reviewed first to determine if there are any trends or differences in participation by demographic characteristics (Field, 2015). The data in Table 1 identify how the variables of sex, residency status, first generation, and underrepresented racial/ethnic group status align with student participation in FWS.

For the qualitative portion of the study, the participants were selected from students offered FWS at the university during the 2019-2020 aid year and still on campus. In order to create a purposeful sample, a short survey was sent out in December 2021 to this group of students who had been offered FWS. The two surveys were sent out to students by the financial aid office, one for students who participated in FWS and one survey for students who declined. The surveys were cross-sectional and mainly consisted of forced-choice questions, with the

opportunity for the students to submit one open-ended question, to sum up any additional feedback they may want to add (Fink, 2017). Some questions I asked included job satisfaction and how they found their work-study job. For students who declined, the questions focused on their perception of FWS, why they declined, and what other school or work activities took priority. The surveys included an opportunity for the student to participate in an interview regarding their impressions of and experience with FWS.

Through the survey responses, I created a sample that reasonably represents FWS students at the university (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After sending multiple reminders to invite students to participate in the survey, I felt I had enough students to detect any patterns or differences between the two groups since there ceased to be any additional submissions from students for the surveys (Seidman, 2013). The survey was sent to 196 students who accepted FWS and 496 students who declined FWS. Ultimately, 26 students who accepted and participated in FWS responded to the survey, and 56 students who declined FWS responded. I then interviewed 6 students who accepted the FWS award and 10 students who declined the award (see interview protocol in Appendix B). In order to protect the students' identities, I assigned them pseudonyms and generalized some possibly identifiable personal information (Seidman, 2013). Table 2 shows the general characteristics of the participants who volunteered for an interview and either accepted or declined FWS.

During the coding process, I was looking for any overlap in the responses that would help determine if there are trends and if I interviewed enough students to be able to determine themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The findings from this portion of the study, the data provided a deeper understanding of the trends found within the quantitative data as well as additional themes related to students' experiences with FWS and whether and how it shaped their collegiate



experience and preparation for a career (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Each student's individual experience reveals what they valued during their college experience and how different goals manifested through either accepting or declining FWS.

To analyze the qualitative data from individual work-study participants, the interviews were transcribed, and then organized the partially processed data into themes by utilizing an analyst-constructed typology (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The themes were guided by the analysis of the data collected from the financial aid office and the responses from the students. While analyzing the interviews, I first utilized open coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I read over the transcripts of the interviews and took note of any patterns or thoughts that I had while reading through the participants' responses.

Given that I had utilized semi-structured questions for the interviews, I could keep a tight focus and narrow what items were essential during data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through open coding and then color-coding categories, I developed themes regarding how students choose to accept or decline federal work-study. I identified initial understanding and concerns, how students learn about FWS, student goals, pros, and cons of FWS, recommendations for improvement, and how this reflected their investment in their human capital. I utilized a constant comparative approach to create units from all interview responses and created categories that helped illuminate related content (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). By using the same cohort of students and utilizing repeated measures, I hope to discover the systematic variance between the two groups of students: those who accepted FWS and those who declined (Field, 2015).

## **Limitations**

Some limitations need to be addressed regarding this research. Since these data were gathered with the assistance of a campus department, the unit was concerned that some students might be identified due to small enrollment numbers in some campus programs and majors. I did want to explore what majors and job placements students in the data set selected and if it relates to their field of study. The financial aid department was concerned that it would expose too much identifiable information regarding individual students, and the information was not made available. Further, some data on student employment are in two separate databases. Most of the student information regarding financial aid and federal work-study awarding is in the central database utilized for most campus-based processes. Some of the FWS data, such as job type and work locations, are only available through the department of Human Resources (HR) and may require additional access to records that are not housed within the financial aid office. Due to limited authorized access as to who can view this information, it was not possible to include some of the more detailed job placement records.

Another limitation of the study is the inconsistent nature of student participation in the work-study program from one year to the next. It seems reasonable to assume that students may discontinue participation at an accelerated rate during their junior and senior years of college. More research is needed to determine whether FWS participation patterns are stable or predictable. Students participating in the program are in high need due to the Pell Grant eligibility requirement of the award. It is hard to determine if work-study or other need-based aid is what is helping students the most. This is why the qualitative data were imperative in creating a complete picture of how this program is benefiting or possibly failing students.

Creswell (2009) warns of validity concerns when the sample is not the same in both portions of the study. Since access to students once they leave campus is challenging, it was not

possible to contact or interview students within the 2014-15 cohort. There could be a difference between why students participate in FWS during their first year of college and why they choose to continue in the following years. For this reason, I chose to interview students who were still on campus and were offered FWS in 2019-2020.

Another concern was the changing landscape post-pandemic. I wanted to get the most recent cohort that would have had the most similar experience to the 2014-2015 cohort. Future researchers must consider the heavy impact the pandemic has had on all persons when conducting future FWS research and possible shifts in how students view their investment in their human capital.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

According to publicly available data from the state board for higher education, during the 2014-2015 Aid Year, 6,036 students at the Public 4-Year Midwest University received a Pell Grant. Of those students, 662 incoming freshmen met the campus criteria to be offered FWS. Of the freshmen offered work-study, 58% accepted the award. The descriptive data shows that of the 370 females that were offered FWS, 62% accepted the award, whereas, of the 292 males who were offered the award, 42% accepted the award. Most of the students offered FWS were in-state and comprised 80% of the students in the data set, yet 52% of in-state students accepted the award, whereas 55% of the smaller group of 131 out-of-state students accepted.

It is important to review which groups of Pell-eligible students are more likely to accept FWS.

Regarding demographic differences such as first-generation college students and underrepresented student groups, 60% of students from an underrepresented racial or ethnic group and 52% of first-generation students accepted their FWS award. In the 2014-2015 dataset, 54% of students in the sample were first-generation, and 39% were identified as being from an underrepresented student group.

### **Not Understanding or Remembering Initial FWS Award**

Table 3 shows the percentage of survey participants who responded that a specific issue was something they considered when deciding not to participate in FWS. A common theme from the surveys and interviews was an overall lack of understanding regarding FWS. Lack of knowledge of available jobs was indicated by 79% (44 of the 56 students) of those who declined FWS as a factor in their not participating. A lack of understanding of how to accept the award was selected by 71% of participants and ranked third most popular reason for not participating. These findings were also reflected in the interviews with students who declined FWS, as some

did not have a good understanding of the FWS program. Ashlyn stated that she did not know about it and did not know where to look for a job on campus, “my biggest discouragement was not knowing where to look and um, by that time, I think I had a job off campus, and so I was kind of satisfied after my freshman year that I found my own job.”

The lack of understanding may have also related to the FWS award not standing out to participants, as some do not recall ever having been offered this type of aid. Emma, for example, did not remember it being on her freshmen award letter, “from what I remember, I didn't know about it. Um, so I don't know if I would've done it if I'd known it, but I don't think I did.” Heidi also did not remember FWS on her award letter, “if it was in the like original list of, um, of awards that you just accepted decline, it might have been in there with all the other things that I accepted, and I might not have done it or realized it was in the accepted stuff.” Mike also did not remember the award, “when I received like that award packet, I don't think I really even looked into it. So, I don't know if, yeah, when I got it, if it was just, you know, we were receiving so much mail that didn't catch my eye or something, or stand out that much to me. I don't remember looking at it.” Shelly stated, “I accepted the work-study at first, but then I didn't even, I was really confused on what it meant and how to do it, so I ended up, um, not doing it anymore.” This sort of hazy memory was quite common, and it seems that the award did not stand out in the offerings to the students.

Students who accepted FWS were more open to exploring all financial aid awards listed on the offer letter, including federal work-study, and did not have a great deal of initial understanding about the award without assistance from someone else. Kai, a junior in architectural studies originally from Illinois, relied on asking her parents and having a brother who had started college three years earlier. Kai explained, “my mom said a work-study award is

a good thing, so I decided I would try it out.” Rosalyn, a junior in Psychology, stated that she knew she would need to accept most of what was offered to her, and she stated, “when I was applying for college, my guidance counselor explained the kind of more what it was.” Hilary, a junior in Nursing, stated that it would be a challenge to pay all of her college costs and stated, “me and my mom accepted everything, because we knew that we needed it.”

### **Finding a FWS Job**

All students who accepted and participated in a work-study position their first year who were interviewed found their job through the campus work-study website. Less than half (42.31%) of the students surveyed stated that it was effortless to find a work-study job and only two (7.69%) surveyed stated that it was somewhat difficult to find a position. Precisely 50% of the survey respondents who accepted an FWS position stated that it was not difficult or somewhat easy to find a job. Carissa stated that she found her job last minute by using the work-study website, “by the time I was choosing, [jobs] were few and far between, but I looked for ones that I knew I would be capable of doing and wanted to do.” Jessica and Hilary found that the career center website was accessible, and they could use search terms that matched their majors. Rosalyn also used the search function on the University work-study site to find a job she thought would match her interests. She stated, “I went through the psychology ones, read the descriptions, and found one that would work best for me.” Angela also used the website, and it was important to her to find a job that would benefit her goal to attend medical school eventually.

Gina felt that the financial aid emails helped guide her to her first job as an on-campus tutor. Kai also worked with this program as a tutor after finding a listing on the campus work-study search website. All the students I interviewed said that once they made it to the work-study

website maintained by the campus career center, they found the different options helpful in finding their first job. The website also proved helpful if the first job was not a good fit. Hilary stated, “sophomore year, I kind of knew that I wanted to switch positions just because there wasn't that much to do, and that stressed me out going into it. I just looked at different positions and looked at like how many hours they expected.”

Some participants mentioned that if it were not for formal reminders about the program, they might have missed out on participating. Carissa, a junior in Health Sciences, stated that she knew that being out of state, she would need to accept everything offered. However, she did not have a robust support system at home, so it was only due to an email reminder about work-study potentially being canceled that she decided to participate officially: “my father (who went to college) passed away before I went to college, so I am not a first-gen college student, but with the amount of help I had, I sort of am.” Angela, also a junior in Health Sciences, mentioned that it was an email she received that encouraged her to participate and guided her to the campus work-study website.

Students who participated in FWS had quite a few recommendations to improve the program and information regarding available jobs. They felt like there needed to be more visibility on campus. Jessica stated, “As a first-generation student, I don't always know where to look for things. The multicultural center got their own coach and advisor, and I think she just started talking to me one day and told me about her position and helped me like find like a mentor in my major and stuff. I think that guidance is really important to me in college.” Angela also felt there should be more resources, “I think that it was kind of confusing to like find and actually know what it was. I just feel like more information on it and making it a little bit more easily accessible.” She felt that students had to dig around on the career center FWS website and

randomly sift through the listings to find a job. This finding is also mirrored in the survey data among those who declined FWS. One of the survey respondents put it simply that the FWS options were “not ideal jobs.” In a rather direct manner, one student stated in their survey response that FWS is “a waste of taxpayer money.”

### **Students’ View of Earning Money While in College**

Students who declined seemed to feel there was not much of a financial incentive to accept the award. Of the 56 students who declined FWS and responded to the survey, half (28) stated that they already had an off-campus job, and 73% affirmed that the FWS pay rate influenced their decision not to participate. Interestingly, 56% stated that “not wanting to work while in college” factored into their decision to decline FWS. One anonymous student who participated in FWS, and offered additional commentary in their survey response. They had a different perspective and valued those funds even if they are small: “it’s not realistic for everyone to just not work, due to their financial circumstances. Even though work-study jobs don’t pay a lot, it’s nice that students can have them as an option.” Angela, for example, said, “it was helpful to have some kind of income at the time, and obviously, it doesn't pay very much so I was working another job as well.” Rosalyn stated that she was not happy with the wages at her FWS job after working elsewhere over the summer but was able to negotiate a better wage. She explained to her FWS supervisor, “if you want me to be still working here, I can get a job somewhere else that pays higher. So, they gave me a pay raise to keep me on.”

Among those who declined FWS, the FWS pay was not enticing enough. Victor said, “from what I understood, you know, it was like you worked. And I didn't, I didn't need the extra like \$500 in my account.”



Colton stated, “it's honestly just better to get a job outside of campus. Yeah. In which you can work way more hours and get paid in some areas slightly a little bit more.” Colton’s statement highlights that some students look at it strictly as an economic exchange, and if it is about making money, there are more lucrative opportunities off campus. Similarly, Mike felt that he benefited from being a student and being able to work non-traditional hours remotely for a private company, “I was like perfect for it because a lot of the other people who worked in the department would do like 7:00 AM to, you know, 3:00 PM. Then I think I would hop on a lot at like four to nine, or four to 10. I do those three times a week.” Kate stated, “I had a job offered to me that paid more than I would've got from doing a work-study.”

### **Students Valuing Education over Participating in FWS**

As for students who declined FWS, some stated they wanted to focus on school and not work. This was also indicated in the survey data, where 57% of the declined FWS respondents indicated that not wanting to work during college was a factor for them. Colton said, “As a freshman, I didn't need to work. I thought it was one of those things where it seemed like better to focus on classes kind of thing when you looked at it.” Emily said she was happy that she did not work as an incoming student, “I got to make connections with people instead and have other experiences.” Heidi said, “I've wanted to focus on my studies 100% of the time and I figured that working would kind of contrast that.”

Many participants were concerned about getting the most out of their education and focusing on their study area. Shelly said, “My number one thing was probably obviously my degree. I am actually really passionate about school, but then also all of my friends and like the memories of like doing stuff with them and walking around campus and like making my

friends.” This relates to feedback in some of the interviews that showed the importance students put on building relationships in college.

Related to this, finding FWS positions where this acknowledgment of the student experience was necessary: “my [FWS] position was very understanding of the fact that I was a student first. I liked this very much, and I still work there three years later.” Some participants described valuing supervisors who understood that students are there to focus on school and offer flexibility around coursework. Kai stated, “I would say the main benefit, because it’s on campus, we don’t have to worry about whether our bosses are going to understand like we’re in college.” Jessica expressed a similar sentiment and appreciated supervisors who understand that they are in college, are flexible and allow studying at work if there is downtime.”

For other participants who ended up declining, the benefits of FWS were not clear enough to accept that offer. They were often looking at the big picture and how it would fit with their academic goals and career aspirations. Victor stated, “If I have the choice between work-study and my current job, um, just for my career, my current job makes more sense.” Colton stated, “I’m not focused on any other thing except school. I’m involved in an honors accounting fraternity, and other clubs in the business school, and volunteer clubs. I think definitely getting involved is crucial.” Daniel stated, “If I had any like jobs that would give me direct experience, because I want to go into psychiatry at the end of the day. So, if there were any more like positions, that would’ve been helpful.” Each student gave reasons why specific college experiences were valuable and why participating in FWS might take away from that pursuit.

### **Work-study as an Investment in One’s Human Capital While in College**

Students who were interviewed spoke about wanting to have a job that would help with their career aspirations. Jessica was concerned about finding a job where she felt she could make

money, and that would also go along with her health professions program. She said that she was not interested in the ones at the dining halls or some of the other more common listings and said, “I found [an option within] child development, and I have done it for like two years.” Angela also stated that being in health sciences, “I feel like the biggest thing is just being in that field.” This sentiment was also echoed by Carissa, who aspired to attend medical school, and believed it was essential to have a position that would allow her to meet current and future doctors. Gina felt like it would be an excellent way to figure out what she wanted to do and was also an excellent way to meet people. Hilary also mentioned that she enjoys working at the Career Center and feels a sense of competence in her role, noting, “[I] know exactly what I am doing when I go in.”

Environmental factors also led to some students switching jobs after their initial position, such as Gina did her second year after working in one position her freshman year and part of her sophomore year. She explained that she had trouble continuing working as a tutor because of the shift to an online format due to the pandemic, “with the Rec (Recreation Center), I’ve just done swim lessons since I was 15 years old, so that was a super easy one for me and I just really like it.” Many of the students who accepted FWS had multiple examples of positive outcomes they had from participating in the program.

Location and type of work were also important factors to the students. Carissa knew that she wanted something quiet and not people-centered. Getting to work quickly also became a positive benefit of working on campus. Jessica emphasized proximity, noting, “I think the location is one of the most important parts of it because I don’t have a car.” Carissa said, “There were positions at the Student Center, but they’re definitely full of people, so yeah, [I wanted] a quiet desk job and [be] able to fit around my schedule really easily.”

Students were aware of why type of jobs would be best for their strengths. Rosalyn wanted to find a job that did not require her to work with people and stated, “I hate doing phone calls.” Another downside that students mentioned was if a job did not have enough for them to do, and it seemed like their time was not being utilized well. Hilary relayed her experience at one FWS job “I felt like I always should be doing something, but like there wasn't that much to do. I felt bad if I was studying during the time.” Jessica also relayed a very negative experience a friend had with a FWS location, “they hired her, but then unhired her. They were like, we need someone with like more experience or we're looking for other candidates, but they hired people with no experience all the time!”

Of the survey participants who accepted FWS, 66% stated that it was moderately or very important that their on-campus job relate to their field of study. Even more important to the students who accepted FWS was the type of tasks they would be performing at their job with 91% of respondents stating that it was moderately to extremely important to them. One student stated in the survey, “my current work study position is much more enjoyable than the one I had in 2019-20. I'd suggest only creating positions where there is work that needs to be done.”

This need for students to see a purpose or to be useful in the role was shared by other participants too. Even in cases where the FWS position was unrelated to students' field of study, students still found it beneficial if they were learning new skills or learning more about their interests. One thing that came across in the interviews was that students did not want to feel like their time was being wasted on their job site and they expected a level of instruction and organization to be present.

Students who were satisfied with their FWS job even if it did not relate to their academic focus were able to connect the value of the soft skills they gained. Kai felt that although her

tutoring job does not directly relate to what she wants to do, she gained many valuable skills. She shared, “it doesn’t necessarily relate to my career, but I have stuck with it because I realize there are a lot of skills, I have gained that are beneficial in the workforce.” She mentioned that some of the most valuable skills were learning how to work with children and their parents, her bosses, and how to work within an office and process paperwork.

Participants also wanted to see more efforts made for major-specific opportunities. Gina stated, “The only feedback I have is I still, to this day, haven't found any political science or economics work-study positions.” Jessica added, “I think opening certain positions for more obscure areas, like for the plant science majors.” Kai also felt that there needs to be more focus on majors, “I feel like if there's more variety of jobs, it would be even more beneficial, not just in teaching like life skills and work skills, but like you can also learn something if it has something to do with your major.”

Despite these suggestions, the overwhelming consensus about FWS was positive. Of the survey respondents who had accepted FWS, 92% would recommend participating in FWS to other students. A student who did participate would often try other jobs in the FWS program if the first one was not a good fit. The ease of transferring FWS funds from one job site to another was a benefit of the program. One student summed up their FWS experience as, “I’ve had a great time, I love my work study job on campus and I wouldn’t have changed it for anything.”

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications**

The relationship between FWS and student outcomes is currently unknown and multifaceted, since both educational and social systems are involved. In the best-case scenario, there is the transfer of learning that can be applied to a student's subject area and professional job training that can be utilized after college and increase their human capital. A student may see the most benefit from working as an undergraduate student if it allows them to expand their resume, and professional skills, and does not interfere with their coursework. The proximity to the classroom should be a benefit and keeping students engaged on campus while working.

This study is consistent with current research, which shows that only a fraction of students eligible for FWS ends up participating in the program (Scott-Clayton & Minaya, 2014). Of students offered FWS in 2014-2015, 53% accepted the award. This acceptance rate does not give the complete picture of how many students missed out on the opportunity since FWS participants must meet campus criteria and follow through on finding a job. Another factor is the low pay of FWS positions, as 73% of the survey respondents said that a reason they declined the award was due to low wages (Scott-Clayton & Minaya, 2014).

These results reveal that more resources are needed to improve participation in FWS and its perceived student value. More than 74% of employers would like graduates to have some prior work experience (Akos et al., 2022). Most students included in this study did not have a good understanding of the award when they decided whether to accept the award. One student who participated in FWS felt that individuals need to be made more aware of the opportunity, and it is not sufficient to have it included in the financial aid award. One way that might be helpful is to connect prospective FWS participants with students currently working on campus to help them see the benefit, perhaps virtually, through short video testimonials.

This study is also consistent with current research that states that the majority (82%) of universities and colleges award FWS to high-need students (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Given the scarcity of FWS funding, it is understandable why colleges tend to focus on Pell-eligible students first. At the same time, many students have a moderate SES and could also benefit from expanding funding for FWS. This is also reflective of students having to decide at the start of the semester of their first year of college when they may be focused on getting adjusted to campus. It would be interesting to research if the participation rates would increase if funds were more widely offered initially in a student's sophomore year.

Various student support staff on campus did have an impact on student participation, and various college departments must take an interest in presenting this option to their students to enhance their human capital investment options while earning their degrees. Students who participated in FWS also mentioned how much having supportive and engaged supervisors enhanced their experiences. The reason they might switch to another job on campus came down to the type of tasks, flexibility with school, and how their job made sure to have tasks ready for them to complete and clear instructions.

Some students mentioned that they reviewed the award with their families. If they had a sibling who participated, a school counselor that mentioned it, or a parent that encouraged them to accept all of the awards, they would be more likely to participate in FWS. Many of the students who declined did not remember being offered the award and they were not sure why they did not consider it. Current research suggests that many students who are high-need also have the most difficulty acquiring guidance and the information to fully analyze and understand for college planning (McKinney & Roberts, 2012). This seemed to be accurate as students who were interviewed said their parents suggested they accept FWS because the student needed to

accept all assistance offered, not due to any knowledge of the program or its benefits. Culturally aware and user-friendly financial aid materials are important, as researchers have found that students interpret materials differently (Tierney & Venegas, 2009).

The students also felt that there should be a major-based connection to FWS and that this might be something that should be part of their university onboarding and helping them find a match with a job that met their needs and enhanced their area of study. Some of the declined FWS students went so far as to state that they did work and sought employment off-campus that was more suited to their career goals and paid better. Overall, there is minimal funding available for FWS (Scott-Clayton & Minaya, 2014). This can be seen in this study, as all students offered FWS were Pell-eligible and had high need. This excludes students who might still have a moderate need and could benefit from the program.

For many students, participation did come down to a self-assessment of personal and monetary value. It is crucial to consider students' understanding of the award and how they are perceiving its worth. Is it a means to pay for college, or is it a means to invest in one's human capital? Many students mentioned that the pay was not a factor in participation and that the jobs did not pay well (Kenefick, 2015; NASFAA, 2016). Since the award was not substantial, it was easy for the students awarded more merit scholarships to disregard it.

Interview participants said they wanted a good balance between school, organized activities, and work (Bote & Meadows, 2009). As previous researchers have found, students are focused on getting the most they can out of their college experience and realize they have a limited amount of time for all of the activities they want to participate in, including socializing and building relationships with other students (Cheng & Alcántar, 2007; Lang, 2012; Taylor,



Snyder, & Lin, 2019). Many of the students interviewed did not want to sacrifice their goals by participating in activities that might take them away from their personal college goals.

Given the current amount of funding, it seems reasonable to say that, at the very least, the value of experience is where a student would currently see the most significant return for participating in FWS. Also, one thing to note is the success of work-study programs being created at the K-12 level, such as Cristo Rey Fort Worth High School's Corporate Work Study Program, which lets students have real-world work experience before they attend college (Fadden, 2022). There is a great benefit to a student's cultural capital by having as many diverse experiences at college as possible. Students are influenced by their community, high school experiences, and many other factors when deciding how they feel about college, as well as their general perception of higher education (Perna, 2006).

It is notable that all interview participants who accepted FWS were female and came from diverse backgrounds, and this seems in line with prior research regarding this program and students who worked while in college (Hall, 2010; Riggert, et al., 2006; Scott-Clayton, 2011). They all stated that they had a primarily positive experience participating in FWS. Some did mention that it took them a couple of different jobs on campus to find the correct fit.

The interview participants all seemed hyper-aware of their goals while attending college. Many wanted to get all they could of their study area and build connections with other students while at college. They were all interested in getting the most out of their college experience, and those who declined did seem to see work as taking away from these goals (Lang, 2012; Mounsey et al., 2013). One theme mentioned in interviews and the survey was access to better scholarships and the decision to turn down FWS. If students perceived that they had enough funds available not to have to work, that seemed to be the more attractive option. They also thought about

aspects such as not being able to take as many breaks if they worked during college. Of the students who accepted FWA, there was an increased number of out-of-state students, which could be a result of the limited funding available to cover the higher cost of attending university for this group of students.

The results of this study reveal that FWS does have a unique value that it can provide students. With a better understanding of the opportunities available, more students would participate, as 46% of the students who declined FWS reported that they would consider it if it was offered to them again now. One primary consideration of the current awarding structure for this aid year was that the award was only offered to incoming freshmen and students who participated in FWS during previous years. Widening the window to accept the award and possibly incorporating information into freshmen seminars or other student-focused events could help make more students aware of this opportunity. FWS has the potential to provide a vehicle for students to enhance their investment in human capital through education and training simultaneously.

Most importantly, this study serves as a place to start answering the six questions that NASFAA (2016) proposed should be a focus of future research on FWS. It illustrates students' experiences under one public, 4-year Midwestern university's model of campus criteria for awarding FWS. This study also sheds light on the type of FWS jobs students had and the interplay with other aid forms, given that more robust aid packages seem to deter participation in FWS. The results indicate that more women, first-generation, and underrepresented racial and ethnic groups are accepting the award. Although this study cannot fully address the outcomes of FWS, participants' assessments of their experience are that it is a largely positive experience for

students who participated. There is room for growth to make it more valuable to their academic pursuits and accessible to more students.

### **Conclusion**

This article provides future researchers with a tangible example of how federal work-study funds are applied at a large public university and how students reflect on their participation in the program. Utilizing actual data from a university after FWS funds are allocated, and a first-hand description of participant experiences could inform best practices nationally; this study is essential to financial aid administrators and researchers in the financial aid field. The public, higher education administrators, and researchers can focus on student loans, grants, and the overall cost of attending college. There has not been as much spotlight on the Federal Work-study program. However, this is one area that could be improved to serve better students who are interested in investing more equally in education and training during their time in college, thus increasing their human capital and overall economic success post-graduation.

This study shows that students awarded FWS do not have a good understanding of the award, and sometimes the lack of value being applied to it can reduce participation. Too often, those accepting the award are looking at it as something that they need to accept because of limited awards available and needing all the funding they can get to afford to attend college. The students who were awarded more scholarships are weighing the investment in school versus the investment in training heavily. For students with more options, there needs to be more education to help them understand how the program could benefit them beyond some pocket change or taking up time that they would otherwise be investing in other on-campus activities or studying that they feel will pay off more in the long-run.

Students who participate in work-study do find value in the experience but most also expressed a desire for it to relate to their area of study and be somewhat structured. They expressed some concern if site supervisors were not engaged or it did not seem to value their time. Those students who had a large number of scholarships who were interviewed did not feel as much pressure to accept the award. It is important that future policy makers do not discount the value of this program, but are clearer on what its purpose is and possibly redefine it. This is a unique opportunity for college campus to assist their students invest in their own human capital in a meaningful way. If these changes occur, it will also be very important for future researchers to see if there is an increase in economic success post-college for students who participate in college curriculum that is supported by complementary FWS experience.

#### **Nexus: Connection to Practice**

- At the most foundational level students' decisions on participating in Federal Work-study can be based on scarcity or abundance mindset. Providing information beyond the basic monetary value of the award could increase participation.
- Students find Career Center job websites and offices integral to finding a FWS job on campus and investments should continue to be made regarding outreach about these resources on campus.
- More departmental participation and investment in degree-specific Federal Work-study tracks would increase the perceived human capital investment value of the award.
- Increasing funding and individual award amounts, as well as updating the Federal Work-study program regulations to keep the program in the financial aid award offer, but not count as Estimated Financial Assistance would increase participation and help more

students. In order to not count against students, this award should be able to be stacked with other scholarships and grants.

## Chapter 6: Scholarly Practitioner Reflection

Throughout my graduate studies in education, there is a theme that has created the scaffolding for my program of study, and that is to become a true scholar-practitioner. In my area of expertise in student support, it is possible, after working with hundreds of students and professional team members, to rely a little too much on antidotal knowledge. When working with people, it is near impossible to remove one's lens from many situations and avoid the trap of trying to lead without a solid research foundation. As a leader, it is essential to get the, "right knowledge, in the right place, at the right time to take action and make decisions," (Bennett & Jessani, 2016, p. 8).

A successful educational leader needs to be able to connect their tacit knowledge through experience with the explicit knowledge gathered from data and research, combined with a well-developed knowledge management strategy. Bennet and Jessani (2016) point out that a well-developed knowledge management strategy has a flow to it that involves people, processes, and technology, with each leg putting pressure on the other to share knowledge and come up with effective processes that serve the organization. Understanding the various levers in an organization is valuable in not wasting time and finding the most effective leadership strategy.

In order to do this effectively, it is helpful to think about the structural frame of an organization and apply valuable references such as, "Mitzenberg's Fives" model, which helps managers understand the flow from workers, to middle management and to senior leadership, as well as the technology and support wings outside the organization that all apply pressure to processes, depending on their degree of influence (Bolman & Deal, 2013). These models help me better understand why educational organizations and institutions are slow to change and what barriers there might be to developing a strategy for change.

Working in financial aid, it is also challenging to pivot or change quickly due to the large degree of compliance requirements that must be followed. Occasionally decisions are made at the Department of Education level that creates a change in policy that requires schools to update processes in a reactionary way. Unfortunately, there is not much time to reflect, but it is essential to take some time after significant changes occur to review the impact on the organization and processes. What is helpful from the dissertation process in this aspect is understanding how to look deeper into why policies create outcomes.

Since people and culture are such an essential factor in leadership, the dissertation process and the EdD program have provided me with an excellent opportunity to dive deeply into who I am as a leader and a colleague. Part of this process involved identifying and processing hidden biases that people have. An important exercise that we as a cohort took part in was taking Implicit Association Tests to be able to reflect on our subconscious positive and negative associations, as provided by Banaji and Greenwald (2013) in their book, *Blindspot*. They state that people bend the truth to navigate social norms, and this is to the detriment of disadvantaged groups of people. Being aware of hidden biases as a leader is important to be able to make sure that team members are being evaluated on merit.

As an educational leader, I am also focused on building a learning culture. A dynamic instructional process with feedback and growth is vital to a successful organization. Gill (2010) argues that the goal should be whole organization to learn beyond individual or team learning. I find this idea fascinating because it is an attempt to push organizations to be dynamic and grow from the collective experiences of the entire team and reflect on how to meet goals. I feel this idea is very fluid and something organizations have trouble achieving. This also builds on the

teachings of Levi (2014) and how to navigate working in groups, and the type of challenges that organizations face.

### **Dissertation Process as a Scholar**

Through the dissertation process, I have become a more substantial scholar. Before I returned to school to pursue a graduate degree, I had spent over a decade working and moving through different industries, such as the music industry. At a certain point in my life, I did not think I would return to school and was unsure of my aptitude as a scholar. The best part of the process is discovering a curiosity and value in research-based decision-making. Pursuing an EdD has been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences I have had educationally. Due to the cohort structure of the program I participated in, I was able to learn from colleagues and work with highly talented faculty.

The doctoral process stretches a person and is truly an investment in professional and personal development. It is as much a study in self as it is a research project. Through the highs and lows and perseverance, I have gotten to the point where I can say that I am a scholar, and I have taken the opportunity to think critically and examine a large amount of data and information upon which practitioners in my field can learn from. It is hard to say if I knew what I know now about the challenge of the process, would I still choose to undertake this commitment? Nevertheless, it is one of the experiences I have learned the most from and helped define who I am as a researcher and higher education professional.



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**Table 1***Incoming Freshmen offered FWS by Campus Criteria in 2014-2015*

FWS Status	Total	Female	Male	In-state	Out-of-State	First Generation	Underrepresented Racial/Ethnic Group
Accepted	353	230	123	281	72	187	157
Declined	309	140	169	250	59	171	106

Source: Departmental data set of students offered FWS

**Table 2***Participant Demographics organized by Accepted or Declined FWS*

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Year	In-State	First Generation	Underrepresented Racial/ Ethnic Group	Accepted/Declined FWS
Angela	Female	20	Junior	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted
Carissa	Female	21	Junior	No	No	Yes	Accepted
Gina	Female	20	Junior	No	No	Yes	Accepted
Hilary	Female	21	Junior	No	No	No	Accepted
Jessica	Female	20	Junior	Yes	Yes	No	Accepted
Kai	Female	20	Junior	No	No	Yes	Accepted
Rosalyn	Female	20	Junior	Yes	Yes	No	Accepted
Ashlyn	Female	20	Junior	Yes	Yes	No	Declined
Colton	Male	21	Junior	Yes	No	No	Declined
Daniel	Male	20	Junior	Yes	Yes	Yes	Declined
Emma	Female	20	Junior	Yes	No	No	Declined
Heidi	Female	20	Junior	Yes	Yes	No	Declined
Mike	Male	21	Junior	Yes	No	No	Declined
Sara	Female	21	Junior	Yes	No	No	Declined
Shelly	Female	20	Junior	Yes	Yes	No	Declined
Victor	Male	21	Junior	Yes	Yes	No	Declined

Source: Interview participants who accepted or declined FWS in 2019-2020

**Table 3**

*Percentage of declined FWS survey participants who cited a specific issue as a factor in declining the award*

Factor	Percentage
Availability of work-study jobs	.68
Lack of knowledge of available work-study jobs	.79
Lack of knowledge on how to accept work-study award	.71
Applied for work-study job but did not get hired	.34
Did not find job by campus work-study deadline	.41
Scheduling/Number of hours offered for work-study job	.64
Location of available on-campus work-study jobs	.46
Types of work-study jobs offered	.63
Relationship to major of available work-study jobs	.57
Work-study pay rate	.73
Had off-campus job	.50
Did not want to work while in college	.57
Other	.27

## Appendix A: Possible Work-Study Student Variables

### **Student Group: All FTC Students Offered Work-study through Campus Criteria only for Aid Year 2014/2015:**

1. Accepted work-study (Y/N)
2. Participated in work-study (List of Semester/AY – Example Fall 2014)
3. Accepted Student Loans (per aid year – Y/N)
4. Gender
5. Race
6. First Generation (Y/N)
7. High School GPA
8. Cumulative Mizzou GPA per Aid Year
9. Credits earned (per semester)
10. EFC
11. Major/College
12. Change of Major (During period of enrollment)
13. Transferred Out of Mizzou - Term/AY?
14. Last Term Attended
15. Graduation Date

## Appendix B: Possible FWS Interview Questions

### **Students who accepted FWS:**

1. How did you choose what financial aid to accept or decline?
2. How did you find your work-study position?
3. What were the main factors in choosing that position?
4. How does this position relate to your field of study and career goals?
5. Why did you decide to accept your work-study award?
6. What do you feel are the benefits of a work-study job?
7. How does work-study work with your class schedule?
8. Is there anything you would change about work-study?
9. What is your overall opinion regarding work-study?
10. What is most important to you regarding your college experience?

### **Students who declined FWS:**

1. How did you choose what financial aid to accept or decline?
2. Why did you decline your work-study award?
3. Did you work while in school?
  - a. If so, how does working fit around your coursework?
4. How do you feel about decline your work-study award now?
5. What would have made this offer more attractive to you?
6. What is your overall opinion regarding work-study?
7. What is most important to you regarding your college experience?

## VITA

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Nina was born in Canada and grew up in West Texas. She pursued degrees in English and Political Science at Texas Tech University before taking time off from school to work in non-commercial radio and the music industry for many years. Nina has a Bachelor of Arts in English from Columbia College and a Master of Education with an emphasis in Higher Education from the University of Missouri. Nina is now completing her Doctorate of Education in the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis with an emphasis in Educational Leadership. She hopes to continue to support and advocate for students through service and research-based initiatives.