

Exploring How Student Employment Affects the
Academic and Co-curricular Choices of
Sophomores

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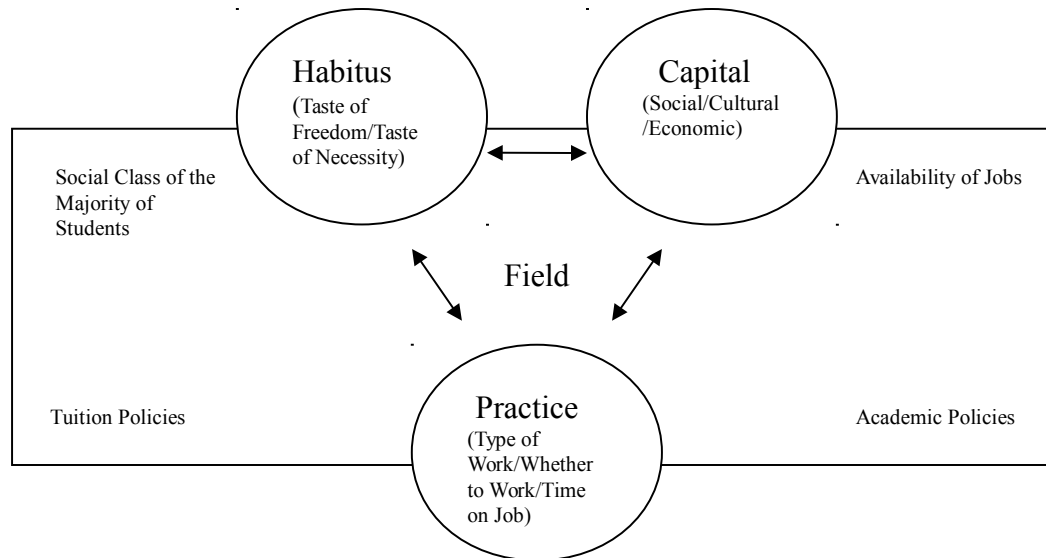
Gaps in the Literature on Student Employment

- The literature is almost exclusively quantitative and explores the effect of work on student outcomes based on arbitrarily defined dichotomous or continuous variables
- The literature does not explore students' reasons and motivations for working and if these vary based on student differences (e.g., race, SES, gender)
- The literature largely ignores the influence of institutional context on student work experiences
- The literature has been criticized due to its failure to explicitly identify theoretical models to guide the research (Riggert et al., 2006)



Theoretical Model

Conceptual Model for College Student Employment as “Practice”



Research Questions

- Overarching Research Question:
How do the work choices of working class and middle-/upper-class students who attend one private four-year university reflect Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction?
- Sub-Questions:
 1. What work choices do working class and middle-/upper-class students make and why do they make these choices? (e.g., whether or not to work; how many hours to work; on-campus vs. off-campus employment)
 2. To what extent do students' work choices vary by class?



Research Questions

- Sub-Questions:
 3. How do the work choices of working class and middle-/upper-class students shape their academic and co-curricular choices?
 4. How do the academic and co-curricular choices of working class and middle-class/upper-class students shape their work choices?
 5. To what extent do these patterns of relationships vary by class?



Research Questions

- Sub-Questions:
 6. How are the work choices of working class, middle-class and upper-class students influenced by institutional characteristics, policies, and practices? (e.g., tuition policies, academic requirements, social class of the majority of the student body, availability of jobs)



Methodology

- Case Study (Cross-case analysis)
 - This study closely followed Yin's (2003) classification of a single case with multiple, embedded units of analysis
 - The case under investigation is the phenomenon of student employment at St. Luke's College. The units of analysis for the study were students from different social class groups (working class vs. middle-/upper-class) and administrators and student employers who were identified as informed experts
- Case selection
 - St. Luke's has high tuition and traditionally has had a conservative tuition strategy
 - St. Luke's has a high percentage of upper-income students and "full payers." For this reason the institution provided a dramatic contrast between the experience of working class and middle- and upper-class students
 - The cohort under investigation (Class of 2010) was the last class admitted before the institution began to meet full need for all students.



Methodology

- Data sources:
 - Analysis of institutional level survey data (2006 CIRP and 2007 NSSE)
 - Interviews with sophomores
 - 12 second-year students (6 males/6 females) from working class backgrounds; 6 second-year students (3 males/3 females) from middle-class backgrounds; 6 second-year students (3 males/3 females) from upper-class backgrounds
 - Interviews with college administrators
 - Vice President for Enrollment Management
 - Director of Financial Aid
 - Dean of Academic Services
 - Dean of International Programs
 - Assistant Director of Residence Life
 - Director of Event Services



Subject Selection

Student	Father's Education	Mother's Education	Father's Occupation	Mother's Occupation	Social Class
Maura	Some College	High School Grad.	Comm. Waterman (25.61)	Homemaker	Working Class
Sarah	Some High School	Potsecondary other than college	Factory Worker (21.23)	Job Coordinator (hardware) (26.59)	Working Class
Sukeina	Some College	High School Grad.	Unemployed	Insurance Agent (41.02)	Working Class
Sydney	High School Grad.	High School Grad.	Factory Worker (21.23)	Secretary (30.01)	Working Class
Alicia	High School Grad.	High School Grad.	Butcher (21.63)	Mobile Park Manager (33.91)	Working Class
Brooke	High School Grad.	High School Grad.	Owner Printing Bus. (39.33)	Owner Advertising Bus. (36.84)	Working Class
Lou	Some High School	Grammar School or less	Custodial Engineer (28.49)	Home Attendant (elderly) (25.98)	Working Class
Luis	High School Grad.	High School Grad.	Tech Support (43.94)	Homemaker	Working Class
David	High School Grad.	High School Grad.	Fire Fighter (37.40)	Maid (13.84)	Working Class
Carlos	Some High School	Associates Degree	Cook (15.80)	Teacher's Aid (30.06)	Working Class
Taylor	High School Grad.	High School Grad.	Unknown	Bus Matron (19.29)	Working Class
Paul	High School Grad.	High School Grad.	Unknown	Disabled	Working Class
Emma	Postsecondary other than college	Potsecondary other than college	Pool Business (44.57)	Unemployed (Nurse)	Middle-Class
Katy	College Degree	High School Grad.	CPA (63.44)	Elementary Para. Prof. (30.06)	Middle-Class
Claire	High School Grad.	College Degree	Building Inspector (32.74)	Artist (45.11)	Middle-Class
Alex	Graduate Degree	College Degree	Minister (38.54)	Teacher's Aid (30.06)	Middle-Class
Chris	College Degree	High School Grad.	Manager Tyco Elec. (46.10)	Religious ed teacher (42.90)	Middle-Class
Red	Some Grad School	High School Grad.	Risk Analyst (55.63)	Pulmonary Technician (36.01)	Middle-Class
Anna	College Degree	College Degree	Hotel Manager (55.18)	Homemaker	Upper-Class
Karen	College Degree	College Degree	Treasurer-Credit Union (54.01)	Registered Nurse (63.57)	Upper-Class
Rebecca	Graduate Degree	Graduate Degree	State Investigator (46.08)	Business Executive (55.85)	Upper-Class
Gareth	Graduate Degree	Graduate Degree	CPA (63.44)	HR Professional (46.03)	Upper-Class
Nick	College Degree	Graduate Degree	Stock Broker (59.51)	Salesperson (43.47)	Upper-Class
Manny	Graduate Degree	Some College	Physician (74.72)	Registered Nurse (63.57)	Upper-Class

Findings: Students' Work, Academic and Co-curricular Choices by Class

Student	Class	Job		Hours	Major	Abroad
		On-Campus	Off-campus			
Maura	Working Class	Desk Assistant (Residence Hall)	Primate Keeper (Zoo)	16-20	Bio-Psych	No
Sarah	Working Class	Office Assistant (Career Center)	Flower/Gift Clerk;Retail Clerk;Babysitting	16-20	Math	No
Sukeina	Working Class	Service Coordinator (CCSJ);Teach for America Coor.	Food Expiditor (Red Robin)	31-35	Psychology	No
Sydney	Working Class	Event Staff		11-15	Political Science	No
Alicia	Working Class	RA:Office Assistant (Provost Office);Yearbook Editor		36 +	Communications	No
Brooke	Working Class	RA; Office Assistant (Intramurals)	Babysitting	11-15	Communications	Rome
Lou	Working Class	RA; Building Supervisor (Rec. Center)		11-15	Psychology	Bangkok
Luis	Working Class	Lab Assistant (Biology Dept.)	911 CAD Support	16-20	Biology	No
David	Working Class	RA; Lifeguard (Rec. Center)		16-20	Communications	No
Carlos	Working Class	Men's Baseball Manager		11-15	Theology	No
Taylor	Working Class	Desk Assistant (Residence Hall)		6-10	Sociology	No
Paul	Working Class	Office Assistant (Admissions)	Sales Associate (Gap Inc.)	26-30	Business	No
Emma	Middle-Class	Office Assistant (Residence Life)		11-15	Business	Lueven
Katy	Middle-Class	Event Staff		21-25	Business	Beijing
Claire	Middle-Class		Waitress	21-25	Communications	No
Alex	Middle-Class	Event Staff		16-20	English	Aukland
Chris	Middle-Class	RA; Office Assistant (Campus Ministries)		11-15	Secondary Ed.	Transferring
Red	Middle-Class	RA	Sales Associate at GNC	26-30	Business	New Castle
Anna	Upper-Class		Cashier/Bed Runner (Tanning Salon)	16-20	Business	Paris
Karen	Upper-Class		Waitress	21-25	Communications	Lueven
Rebecca	Upper-Class	RA		11-15	Education	Melbourne
Gareth	Upper-Class	RA; Alpha Aid		11-15	Business	Melbourne
Nick	Upper-Class	Event Staff		6-10	Business	No
Manny	Upper-Class	RA; Intramural Staff		11-15	Biology	No

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Findings

Work Choices:

- Working class students were more likely to work more hours and to combine on-campus and off-campus employment than their middle- and upper-class peers (RQ 1 & 2)



On working so many hours and holding
multiple jobs:

“If a grade falls here or there I will be okay”
-Sarah, working class

“My grades have suffered and I haven’t done as
well as I think I could.”
-Paul, working class



Findings

Work Choices:

- Despite being employed more hours, and balancing the demands of multiple jobs, working class students often derived a sense of “belonging” or “fit” through their roles as employees. Their jobs provided what Hess (2007) calls an “environmental niche.”(RQ 1 & 2)



Finding her “niche” through a campus
job:

“It’s a good click...they are really a good group of
friends that are working together...It was a
different group of kids than you’re used to
seeing around St. Luke’s, that’s for sure.”

-Sydney, working class



Some working class students only found their “niche” at off-campus jobs:

“I meet people who have car payments and pay rent. But they are the same age as me and we have similar interests. I feel more distant from St. Luke’s.”

-Sukiena, working class

“My roommates give me a hard time for working sometimes. They don’t understand why I work so much. Some of my friends have ended up resenting me, I feel like a little bit, for working so much and not spending time with everyone else. They don’t really understand the whole thing that you don’t have a safety net or someone to fall back on.”

-Claire, middle-class



Findings

Academic Choices

- Working class students were less likely than their middle- and upper-class peers to study abroad (e.g., only 2/12 decided to participate)(RQ 3, 4, & 5)
- Working class students' decision not to study abroad was influenced by a concern over the continuity of their employment and the boundaries of their habitus (RQ 3, 4, & 5)



On affordability:

“Not everyone’s parents can support them being in another country with the exchange rate being the way it is.”

-Paul, working class

On the boundaries of social class:

“I don’t really know if I’d be able to adjust well on my own financially in another country. It was something that was **kind of scary to me** and I know I’ve settled into a routine here...I have a job that’s guaranteed steady and I don’t want to leave my job back home.”

-Sydney, working class



Study abroad or travel abroad?

“If I am going to be abroad for a year I’m going to do *everything*. I am going to go *everywhere* I possibly can and if that means I’m going to come back and go into credit card debt, fine I will pay it off. I will figure out a plan. I will make a budget. When I’m over there it will be the first time. I never have traveled for a year. It will be the first time that I am on my own, away from my family. So I am going to live it up.”

-Karen, upper-class

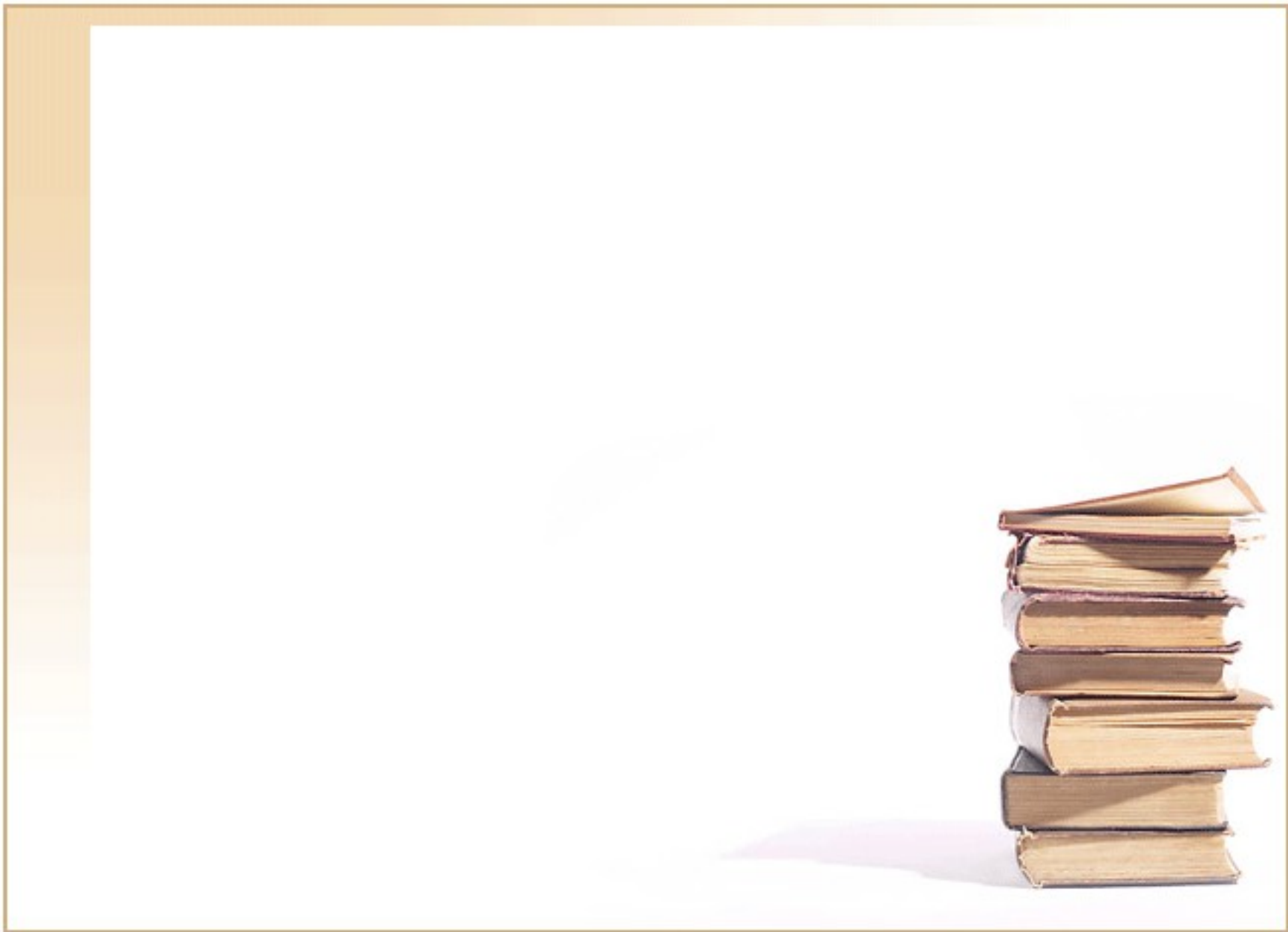


Findings

Institutional Policies and Practices

- The policy in the business school that required students to complete 2 out of 3 experiential components made it more difficult for working class students to complete the major (RQ 6)
- The practice of accounting for RA compensation as part of financial aid package created an inequity whereby working class students often received less financial benefit for serving in the position (RQ 6)





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Conclusions/Discussion

- Overarching research question:
 - The theoretical framework offered, based on Bourdieu's constructs does prove useful in understanding how students' social class background influences their work, academic and co-curricular choices
 - Bourdieu's (1984) distinction between the working class habitus as a "taste of necessity" and the upper-class habitus as a "taste of freedom" is particularly useful when considering these choices
 - Data from this research study suggest students from different social class backgrounds, attending the same institution, may accumulate different types and amounts social and cultural capital and that their employment choices do play a role in this process.



Future Research

- Longitudinal follow-up to this research with the participants of the study as young alumni
- Replication of the research at institutions with different student and employment characteristics (e.g., four-year commuter or community college)
- More research that closely examines the relationship between student employment and learning



Selected References

