

## Effects of Work-Based Learning

By: Anne C. Lewis

The persistent myth that students who use high school to gain work-based experiences are not good college candidates has been blown away by the results of a study funded by the U.S. Department of Education. It comes at a time when government proposals might further diminish opportunities to engage in work-based learning because of their heavy emphasis on core academic work in high school.

The Educational Policy Institute and the New England Association of Schools and colleges collaborated on a study of incoming freshmen at eight four-year institutions. In addition to a survey of students, the study examined transcripts that included university grade point averages, credits earned, and student persistence.

Work-based learning apparently is part of the pre-college experiences of a large percentage of college students, and it gives them an edge on being successful in college. Granted, the study's definition of work-based learning is very broad. It includes job-shadowing, short- and long-term internships, community service projects, cooperative education, youth apprenticeships, career academies, school-sponsored enterprise, and tech prep programs. The advantage of spending time on one or more of these work-based learning offerings, however, is obvious. According to the results:

- Two-thirds of the student sample participated in at least one work-based learning activity, about one-third participated in two or more activities, and more than 11 percent engaged in three or more during high school.
- The highest percentage activity was school-sponsored community service programs (47 percent of all students had participated). In addition, almost 24 percent participated in a job-shadowing program, and more than 12 percent took part in a school-sponsored enterprise.
- Students who had been part of work-based learning were more likely to plan on academic studies beyond a bachelor's degree, and the more activities in high school, the more post-baccalaureate education was anticipated.
- Almost two-thirds of the students said they learn better through hands-on projects and real-world application than through classroom work and textbooks. About the same percentage said they wanted to participate in work-based learning activities in college, but less than half (49 percent) said their campus provided such opportunities.
- Work-based learning increased interest in attending college for 44 percent of the students.
- More than two-thirds of the students who participated in two or more work-based learning activities earned a college grade point average of 3.0 or higher, compared with 58 percent of the whole cohort.

EPI President Watson Scott Swail said the study results are an important message for college admissions officers. They typically do not pay much attention to applicants with a work-based learning or vocational background, he said, but "our findings suggest that these students do well in higher education and could be more clearly targeted by admissions personnel." For information on the results of the survey, contact Swail at [wswail@educationalpolicy.org](mailto:wswail@educationalpolicy.org).