



Executive Summary

Labor Program Experiences Survey

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Berea College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

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Forum 40404 Labor Program Survey Results January 2018

Introduction

Alumni members of *Forum 40404* responded last fall to a survey designed to explore their experiences related to the Berea College Labor Program. *Forum 40404* is the name given to the group of 227 alumni who currently serve as a volunteer survey panel. The volunteers attended the College spanning over six decades (back to the 1950s). Working with the College's Administrative Committee, the staff of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment is planning on sending four to five brief surveys to the panel that could help guide College decision-making.

When *Forum 40404* members were asked why they volunteered for the survey panel, the most common reasons were 1) *to give back and stay connected*; 2) *to help current and future students*; and 3) *to be an alumni voice*.

The following is the executive summary outlining the results of the first survey (67% of Forum 40404 members responded).

Results

In order to understand how labor assignments affected various educational and professional outcomes while in college and later in life, the *Forum 40404* members were asked to place their student work positions/assignments into one or more categories including jobs:

- *Related to my own interests/learning or enjoyment but NOT related to a future career interest*
- *Not related to my own interests/learning or enjoyment of future career*
- *Related to my future career interest*

Because students can have multiple jobs while at the College, 50% the respondents placed one or more of their labor positions into the first category; 50% place one or more jobs into the second category; and, nearly 75% placed at least one of their jobs in the third category.

They were then asked four open-ended questions about each of the types of job placements.

- *Describe how it contributed to your personal growth.*

- *How did this position contribute to your career preparation or subsequent professional experiences?*
- *How did this position contribute to your academic success and achievements (that is, connection with the courses you took)?*
- *How did this position affect your appreciation for and interaction with service workers/laborers you have met, worked with, or managed throughout your life after college?*

The types of responses did not vary greatly across the three types of job placements. For example, the contributions made to personal and professional growth were similar regardless of whether a job was related to a future career or one that was chosen for other reasons. For those jobs related to a future career, the respondent was more likely to trace how the job led to an interest in and understanding of a future career but the basic skills learned were nearly identical across job categories.

To illustrate, when asked about how the job contributed to their *personal growth*, respondents mentioned how their labor positions 1) helped them to learn responsibility and understand the value of manual labor, 2) built their confidence and persistence, 3) cultivated their ability to pay attention to detail and 4) helped them to work with many personality types and with people from various backgrounds.

The following examples illustrate some common responses to the question:

Describe how it (the College work position/assignment) contributed to your personal growth.

The following responses were made about a position categorized as **not** related to a future career (males in blue, females in red):

1. *I started off at Berea Woodcraft, I worked as a draftsman, I was trained on the lathe and made numerous pieces for furniture and of course Skittles. - I learned an entire new set of skills. It really set into motion that I could do anything if I set my mind to it.*
2. *Public buildings supervisor - Taught me leadership (led a team of cleaners), responsibility, accountability and taking pride in work well done.*
3. *Secretary-Internship Office, Usher-Convocation - This allowed me to develop relationships with professors and keep a continual proximity to the work being done in my department.*
4. *Server at the Boone Tavern - Working as a server caused me to interact with the public, tourists, prospective donors, and members of the faculty and staff. In order to successfully complete dinner service I learned how to work efficiently and cooperatively with my fellow servers.*
5. *Student Worker and Student Manager in the Dining Hall - It allowed me to learn how to work as a part of a team, and then later on allowed me to learn how to lead.*

6. *Resident Assistant - I learned many leadership skills in this position and I also learned how to communicate with a wide variety of people from diverse backgrounds and cultures.*
7. *Honestly, when I found out that my labor assignment was going to be in food service during my freshman year, I cried. I thought it would be the worst job on campus! It turns out, that was absolutely not the case. Through my food service role, I was able to meet nearly every student at the college. This allowed me to form friendships quicker than some of my peers.*

For a position that WAS related to a future career: Respondents again mentioned many general contributions related to helping them learn responsibility and build confidence, and how to work with diverse others. Following are a few selected quotes:

- *Dishwasher at hospital; nursing assistant - I developed my empathy for the physically ill in the world. Nursing service at Berea Hospital - I got experience caring for patients in the hospital. This added to my clinical experience in nursing classes. It helped me see that I really did want to be a nurse.*
- *Phys ED Instructor/Education - I learned a lot working with a variety of young people with a wide range of capabilities. This would come in handy as I progressed through my chosen profession.*
- *Laboratory assistant, Department of Chemistry - Tremendously helpful in providing a realization of my knack for teaching.*
- *Bookkeeper, college farms, agriculture - Taught me the ins and outs of running the financial side of a large commercial enterprise.*
- *I was an R.A. my sophomore year and Ass't Head Dorm Director my Junior and Senior year. My major was Psychology. As a result, my labor provided skills necessary to be successful as a Pediatric Social Worker helping teen moms prepared for parenthood*

For the question, *How did this position contribute to your career preparation or subsequent professional experiences*, typical responses follow:

- *Nursing service at Berea Hospital - I got experience caring for patients and relating to their families. This helped build my confidence in the skills I was learning in class.*
- *College farm dairy/Agriculture Dept. Office of Dean of Labor/ Administration - Taught me to keep a schedule and arrive ready to carry out my expected duties with no excuses.*
- *Bookkeeper, college farms, agriculture - In schools, accurate accounting is important and the principal is the chief financial officer for everything financial. This farm job was good training for this.*

When asked how labor positions *contributed to your academic success and achievements (that is, connection with the courses you took)*, all respondents who had served as teaching assistants commented on many direct connections to their academics while at Berea College and their continuing education (e.g., being a chemistry T.A. helped them learn chemistry, etc.).

For jobs other than teaching assistants, most respondents did not write about a direct connection to their academics. Instead, they explained how the basic job skills helped them be more disciplined (time management, ability to prioritize) and productive.

However, some respondents were able to articulate a direct connection to academics (across the job types). Some examples follow:

- *Started out in the Labor Office and moved to the accounting appointment office my sophomore year. Also worked as a resident assistant. My jobs provided me with insight to my classroom studies. I could actually visualize and apply what was being discussed in class.*
- *I worked at the Livestock and Poultry farms and also as a lab assistant for one of the Agriculture faculty. All of which served me as Ag faculty during my working life. The faculty-student relationship developed during the labor experience carried over into the classroom.*
- *Computer center key punch operator - Increased knowledge of computer languages.*
- *Working at the Berea College Museum gave me a greater insight into Appalachian history.*
- *Child Development Lab- Child and Family Studies - most of my classes were about teaching and child development so it gave me real life experience where I could use my knowledge and observe child development first hand.*

For the question, *How did this position affect your appreciation for and interaction with service workers/laborers you have met, worked with, or managed throughout your life after college?*

Almost every respondent gave examples of how their work assignments at Berea College helped them understand the “dignity of all labor.” The following selection of comments are typical of the entire group.

- *My labor at Berea College taught me walk in their shoes.*
- *Janitorial - College Library - Throughout my career, I was taught that you "treat the janitor the same as you would the CEO".*
- *ALL people, no matter their status in life deserve honor, kindness and any wisdom that I can share.*

- *I spent 30 years in education and the people you wanted to have on your side more than anyone else were the cooks, custodians, and service workers who fixed things.*
- *Working as a service worker helps you to see the importance of that position. It helped me to understand that everyone contributes to the success of the business.*

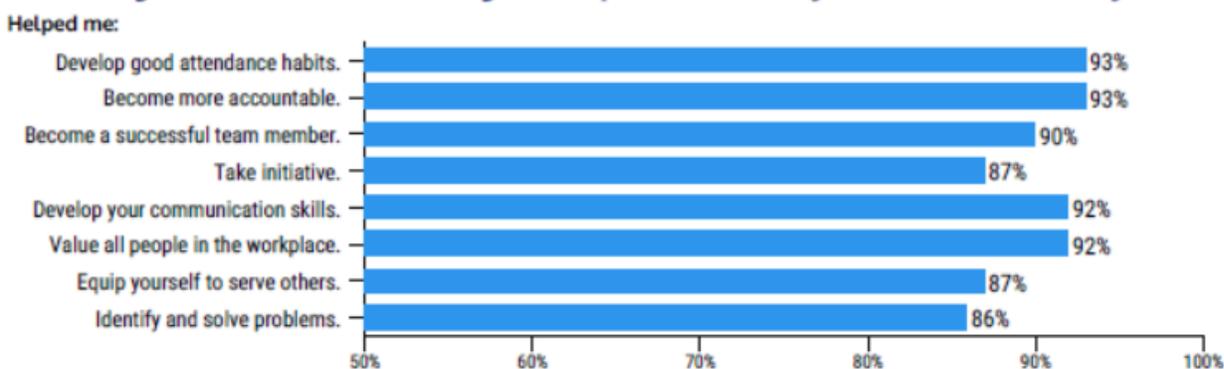
Forum 40404 survey respondents were also asked to rate two sets of statements, one about how well the Labor Program helped them with learning goals of the program (related to attendance, accountability, team work, initiative, communication, value all people, service, problem solving) and the other related to the effectiveness of the Labor Program in meeting each aspect of the Great Commitment related to labor. As the following graphics illustrate, the vast majority of the respondents rated the Labor Program effective in fulfilling the goals of the Great Commitment.

Great Commitment: *To promote learning and serving in community through the student Labor Program, honoring the dignity and utility of all work, mental and manual, and taking pride in work well done.*



Furthermore, respondents rated their work experiences as helping them meet the learning goals of the Labor Program (illustrated in the graph below)

Percentage that rated Labor Program experiences "very well" or "extremely well"



Finally, survey Respondents were asked to respond to two other open-ended items:

- *Please share how your labor supervisors contributed to your personal growth.*

By far, most respondents shared positive examples of how labor supervisors contributed to their personal growth, citing them as good models who took the time to help students learn and develop proper behaviors and values related to work and life. Examples were given of how labor supervisors helped their students learn how to work with, respect, and value others. They wrote

of how their labor supervisors were service-oriented and dedicated their lives to helping others, especially students, by setting high expectations and offering excellent instruction.

- *The Labor Program is one of the College's primary educational programs. A new Dean of Labor, a position that serves on the President's cabinet with the Vice Presidents (the Administrative Committee) started work this month. What advice or suggestions do you have for the new Dean of Labor?*

Advice to the new dean included:

- keep the program going (expressing how valuable it was)
- match jobs to students' majors and interests
- continue to stress the dignity of all labor
- cultivate more alumni and local businesses to provide positions and mentorship
- keep lines of communication open to all students and their labor supervisors
- provide more service type positions
- be sure to recognize students for outstanding work and service

Summary

The results of the Forum 40404 survey were in line with years of institutional research on the Labor Program. Current students rate their labor experiences highly and alumni reflect very positively on the virtues of learning to work and working to learn. This has been an enduring finding for decades.