FEDERAL WORK-STUDY STUDENT HANDBOOK

Virginia Commonwealth University
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OVERVIEW
The Federal Work Study (FWS) program is a federally funded part-time employment program available to assist students in meeting their financial obligations to the University and to encourage community service involvement. The Federal Work Study Program is intended to offset the cost of the student's education. Students are awarded Federal Work Study by Financial Aid as a part of their need-based financial aid award package upon completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Students are awarded regardless of race, creed, national origin or disability. The Federal Work Study program provides students the opportunity to earn a portion of their educational expenses and to gain valuable work experience. The university strives to provide Federal Work Study opportunities that will compliment and reinforce each student's educational program or career goals. The student’s work experience should be a positive learning experience. Federal Work Study jobs may be in settings on or off campus.

This handbook is designed to give detailed information about the Federal Work Study program and to explain the policies and procedures that students and supervisors must adhere to while participating in the Federal Work Study program. Additionally, this guide provides necessary information for students and supervisors regarding all aspects of the Federal Work Study program as well as defining the terms and conditions that are binding upon the acceptance of the award for the student and acceptance of a student worker for the supervisor. Compliance with the regulations set forth in this handbook is essential for the continuation of the Federal Work Study program. Failure to comply with these guidelines could result in termination from the program.

The staff of Financial Aid is committed to providing the student and Work Study supervisor with quality services. The Office of Financial Aid ensures that the FWS program maintains compliance with Federal, state, and university guidelines. Questions concerning the Federal Work Study program should be directed to:

Financial Aid
Grace E. Harris Hall
1015 Floyd Avenue
Richmond, Virginia 23284
(804) 828-6181
workstudy@vcu.edu

Information contained in this handbook is subject to change based on federal regulations.
Eligibility for FWS
Financial Aid, as administrator of the FWS Program, determines FWS eligibility and awards based on the student’s financial need. Financial need is determined after the student completes the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and provides all other required documents to the Office of Financial Aid. All eligible students will automatically be considered for work study awards. Additionally, students must meet general Federal Student Aid eligibility requirements including:

- Enrollment in an eligible degree or certificate program
- Maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress according to university policy
- Be a citizen or eligible non-citizen
- Be enrolled at least part-time.

Applying for FWS
To apply for Federal Work Study students must submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Priority will be given to those that file the FAFSA application no later than March 1 of each year. Questions about filling out this form can be directed to the Federal Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243).

All freshmen and transfer students will receive a written letter from Financial Aid notifying them of their financial aid package in mid to late March. Returning students will receive an email notification in late June to early July. These notifications will indicate if a student has received a Federal Work Study award and the award amount for the school year.

Obtaining a FWS Position
Federal Work-Study positions are available through Handshake, an online data system overseen by VCU Career Services. With this electronic platform, students can search and apply for FWS jobs, follow employers, store documents, access specialized resources, and connect with Career Services staff. Most student employees remain in the same job or with the same employer for the academic year.

Sometimes students may find it necessary to change jobs for various reasons. Students are encouraged to seek other job opportunities in Handshake if they wish to change employers. In addition, students may not be hired into a faculty or staff position and a work-study position due to the FICA tax exemption on work-study earnings. Please note, all University departments, schools, and offices are eligible to hire students who have been awarded Federal Work-Study funds. Interested parties must register for their own access to Handshake with the VCU Career Services.

US Department of Education FWS Regulations

Academic Credit
Academic Credit may be earned as well as compensation for FWS jobs. Such jobs include but are not limited to internships, practicum, or assistantships. However, a student employed in an FWS job and receiving academic credit for that job may not be:

- Paid less than he or she would be if no academic credit were given
- Paid for receiving instruction in a classroom, laboratory, or other academic setting
- Paid unless the employer would normally pay a person for the same job

**Working for a Professor**
Working for a professor is permitted as long as the area of work involved is the type which the institution would normally support under its own employment program. The assignment of students to serve as research assistants to professors is one example. This is appropriate as long as the work performed by the students is in line with the professors’ official duties and is considered work for the institution itself.

**Community Service**
Community Services are defined as services that are identified by an institution of higher education through formal or informal consultation with local nonprofit, government, and community-based organizations, as designed to improve the quality of life for community residents, particularly low-income individuals, or to solve particular problems related to their needs. These services include but are not limited to fields such as: • Health care • Support to students with disabilities • Child care • Mentoring • Literacy training • Tutoring • Public safety • Supporting educational and recreational activities • Crime prevention and control • Counseling • Recreation • Community improvement

**Political Employment**
Employment positions must be free of political involvement. Under this prohibition, students cannot be assigned to work for individual members of Congress. However, students could be assigned to the staff of a standing committee of a state legislature if the selection of staff for such a committee and the work performed by such a staff is conducted in a nonpartisan fashion. Further, the political support or affiliation of students may not be prerequisites or considerations of employment. Positions that involve lobbying at the federal level are also prohibited.

**Religious Employment**
Employment positions must not involve constructing, operating, or maintaining any part of a building used for religious worship or sectarian instructions. The key issues in determining “religious work” in regards to work performed by FWS students are:

1. The main purpose of the building in which the work is taking place
2. The actual job that is being performed.

For example: FWS students may work in a non-profit day nursery operated by a church, as long as the nursery is open to the public on the same basis as for members of the church (i.e., is in the public interest) and as long as the particular positions to which the students are assigned do not involve sectarian instruction or the religious activities of the church. In determining whether any FWS employment will violate this restriction, the FWS office will consider the purpose of the work rather than just the nature of the employing organization.

**Types of Jobs**
On Campus FWS
Students interested in working on campus may apply for a job with one of many departments on either the Monroe Park Campus (MPC) or the Medical College of Virginia (MCV) campus. Available job opportunities include office and clerical support, student services, research and laboratory support, computing, accounting, tutoring, security, lifeguarding, and various specialized positions. On-campus employment serves as a great opportunity to get involved with the campus community while gaining work experience at a close, convenient location.

Off Campus FWS
Students interested in this option may apply for a job with one of our 40-plus non-profit community service partner organizations. Students employed in this area perform direct service to our communities and citizens in need. Typical job opportunities include tutoring (literary initiatives), disability support services, social services, public safety/crime control, gerontology, accounting, and more. Participating students are given the unique opportunity to make a positive difference in their own community while enjoying a rewarding and challenging work experience.

Positions pay a competitive hourly wage and offer a flexible work schedule to accommodate students’ course schedules. Some site locations require students to provide their own transportation; however, there are many off-campus sites that are within walking distance of VCU or accessible using public transportation such as RamRide or GRTC Pulse.

Using your FWS Award
Once a student has accepted a job offer, they will be contacted by their new employer to complete new hire paperwork. Any change in the student’s enrollment status (i.e., enrolling less than part-time) must be reported to the Assistant Director of FWS. Failure to do so may result in cancellation of the FWS award.

*Note: On-campus Federal Work Study students are permitted to start up to 10 days before the semester begins for training and orientation purposes.

Schedules
FWS employers and students are expected to create a mutually agreeable work schedule that accommodates academic requirements. Students are not allowed to work more than 20 hours per week during the academic year. Financial Aid recommends that a student work no more than ten (10) hours per week to ensure that the student has ample time to dedicate to their courses as well as to prevent the student from meeting their FWS earnings limit too quickly.

The exception to this is during periods of non-enrollment, such as winter or spring break, when the student can work up to 29 hours per week. (FWS is not offered for Summer)

When creating work schedules, students and employers are advised to consider:

- Student’s course schedule
• Academic requirements and exam schedules
• Attendance during scheduled holidays and breaks
• Student’s FWS award and hourly wage

Students may continue working until the end of the authorized period of employment, until graduation, or until their FWS award runs out, whichever comes first. Students may not, under any circumstance, continue to work, using FWS funds, after the authorized period of employment has ended, after graduation, or after their FWS award has been depleted. It is the responsibility of the student and the employer to monitor earnings to be certain this does not happen.

If the student exceeds the maximum award for the academic year, the employing department will be responsible for 100% of the student’s earning beyond the authorized award. Unused FWS earnings cannot be carried from one academic year to the next. Students are not allowed to be employed in more than one work study position at a time.

Students are prohibited from working during their scheduled class times. If a class is cancelled, and the student is requesting to work, the student must submit proof with a written statement from the professor, or academic department. The student can forward an email to their supervisor that includes the date, time, and name of the course. This statement must be submitted to the supervisor before the requested shift, otherwise, the student will only be allowed to work their next scheduled shift.

Breaks
It is the policy of the FWS Program that a paid fifteen-minute break is allowed for every continuous 4 hours worked. Breaks are not provided for periods of less than 4 hours. Breaks cannot be used to arrive late or leave early. A 30-minute unpaid meal break must be taken for shifts of 6 hours or more of consecutive work.

FWS Student Earnings Regulations

Student Earnings
Students may not earn FWS funds without a Confirmation Memo on file with the employer for the 2020-2021 work period.

Supervisors are requested to limit a student’s fall semester earnings to that of half of their full academic year award. For example, if a student is awarded $4,000 for the year, supervisors should limit each semester’s earnings to $2,000. If a student decides to withdraw or study abroad in the spring semester, any earnings exceeding half of their full year award will be charged to the department that employs the student.

Students who accepted or were awarded fall semester work study only, may not earn beyond the last day of fall final exams. In the event they do, earnings beyond this date will be charged to the employing department. Records in Banner will also be terminated for all fall only awarded students after the payroll period has posted with the last day of fall final exams as the effective date.
FWS earnings are not credited to a student’s account to pay institutional charges, but are paid directly to the student. Funds from a FWS award will be direct deposited to the student’s bank account. They are deposited semi-monthly according to VCU’s payroll schedule. All paychecks are based on an hourly wage and include only hours worked. Earnings may be FICA exempt and are subject to all applicable federal, state, and local taxes. All student employees must be placed on the University’s payroll system prior to the start of employment.

Federal Work Study Award Changes
A student’s FWS award may sometimes change due to the listed reasons below. In the event that any of the listed reasons below occur, you will be notified to discuss the change in the student’s award and modify their schedule accordingly (which may include immediate removal). In the event that the student has earned more than the amount that their award has been changed to, your department will be charged the overage and their record in Banner will be terminated.

Possible reasons for changes in a student’s FWS award:
- Student has withdrawn from school for the current or upcoming semester
- Student has dropped classes and is now enrolled less than part-time
- Student has received an additional financial aid award which meets their financial need
- Student has been academically dismissed and financial aid has been cancelled
- Student is not meeting the university satisfactory academic progress standards for financial aid eligibility and financial aid is cancelled. Student may keep what has already been earned
- Student owes a refund to a federal grant program or is in default on a federal loan
- Student’s budget has decreased resulting in decreased financial need which is met or exceeded by other awards and FWS earnings to date
- Student’s expected family contribution has increased, resulting in decreased financial need which is met or exceeded by other awards and FWS earnings to date
- Student has graduated or is not eligible for second semester
- Student has outstanding requirements from an updated FAFSA.

Resignation/Termination
While a student may discontinue employment at any time without penalty, a minimum of two weeks’ notice is requested when resigning from any FWS position. FWS jobs should be treated like any other professional employment.

FWS employers may terminate student employees at any time for unsatisfactory performance although it is asked that employers give the student ample warning and a chance to correct the problem before resorting to his/her termination.

Financial aid applicants must comply with the Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy (SAP) as a condition of initial or continued eligibility. Additionally, if a student withdraws from the university or otherwise loses FWS eligibility, FWS employment will be terminated.

Inclement Weather and Other Emergency Conditions
In an emergency, the campus or a portion of the campus may be closed from normal business operations, either prior to or during a work shift. If this should occur, appropriate announcements will be made through the various news media.

Canceling classes or closing state buildings does not necessarily mean that the campus will be closed for normal operations. Students should consult with their supervisor regarding any specific inclement weather and emergency conditions procedures for their departments. In the event of inclement weather or other emergency conditions, students may contact the VCU’s Alert Line at (804) 828-6736 (VCU-OPEN or alert.vcu.edu for recorded updates on University closings. Please be aware that students must NOT be paid for hours they cannot work because the University is closed, even if they were scheduled to work that day.

**Time Keeping with RealTime**

Students that participate in the FWS program are required to enter their time into the RealTime system, a timekeeping system that VCU uses to track worked hours.

**On-Campus & RealTime**

Students that work on-campus through the Federal Work Study program are required to clock in upon arrival, clock out and in for breaks, and clock out at the end of their work period. Missed clock times or adjustments must be reported to your supervisor. Instructions and a training manual for RealTime can be found at [https://hr.vcu.edu/current-employees/timekeeping/](https://hr.vcu.edu/current-employees/timekeeping/)

**Off-Campus & RealTime**

Students that work off-campus through the Federal Work Study are also required to clock in to the RealTime system upon arrival, clock out and in for breaks, and clock out at the end of their work period. Missed clock times or adjustments must be reported to the Assistant Director of Work Study:

Assistant Director of Federal Work Study
Financial Aid
Virginia Commonwealth University
Harris Hall
1015 Floyd Avenue
Richmond, VA 23284
(804) 828-6181
workstudy@vcu.edu

Off-campus student workers are additionally required to print out a hard copy of their RealTime each week, have a supervisor sign the hard copy and submit to the Assistant Director of Work Study.

Forgery of a timesheet submission is not permitted. Departments or organizations will be responsible for paying all forged hours and the student worker may be terminated from the FWS program.

**Payroll Policies and Procedures**
Wages of pay for students in a FWS employment position should commensurate with the responsibilities of the job in which they were hired and cannot be less than the federal and/or state minimum wage. Things to consider when determining the hourly rate:

- How much persons with those skills are paid in the local area for doing the same type of job
- Rates the school would normally pay similar for non-FWS employees
- Any applicable federal, state, or local laws that require a specific wage rate

Pay Guidelines
The university recommends the following pay guidelines for on campus and off campus FWS positions:

- Clerical and General Assistant Positions: $7.25 per hour - $10 per hour
- IT and Lab Assistants: $7.25 per hour - $12 per hour

Pay Wage Increases
Student employees will receive performance reviews at least every 12 months. Evaluation ratings for the past year and discussions of expectations for the coming year will be completed each year. Initial discussion of expectations and performance reviews may be conducted more frequently when appropriate (e.g., a new employee, employee transfers to a new job, changes in performance level during the evaluation period). While increases may be offered at the discretion of the employing department, standard increases may be offered based on the following criteria:

- Promotion to higher level position with related increase in job duties and/or complexity of work.
- Longevity/length of employment
- Additional skills, education, and/or experience gained in the prior term of employment.
- Positive performance evaluation for the prior term of employment

Pay rate increases should be given on a merit basis, not due to an increase in funds. When a student receives an award increase this does not mean he/she should receive a wage increase to help him/her earn the entire award. FWS awards are increased in order to allow students to work for a longer period of time in their employment department rather than having them leave their positions due to lack of funds.

Taxation/Benefits for Federal Work-Study Students

Federal, State, and Local Taxes
All wages paid to FWS and non-FWS student employees are subject to withholding of federal, state and local income taxes unless the student qualifies for exemption.

Unemployment Compensation
FWS and non-FWS student employees are not entitled to Unemployment Compensation through VCU.

FICA (Social Security Taxes)
The IRS revised the regulations that governed the exemption from Social Security and Medicare taxes (FICA) for students enrolled in colleges and universities. Student employees are exempt from FICA taxes if they are enrolled full-time regardless of the number of hours they may work.

1. A student employee is exempt from FICA taxation if s/he is enrolled full-time. Any undergraduate who enrolls for at least twelve credit hours for the spring and twelve credit hours for the fall semester will be considered enrolled as a full-time student for FICA purposes.
2. In the spring and fall semesters, graduate students will be considered full-time if they are enrolled for at least 9 credit hours each semester.
3. Verification of enrollment status must be done twice during the semester. The first time must be at the end of the add/drop period and the second time may be done at the University’s discretion, but prior to the end of the semester.
4. Student employees may work any number of hours (within FWS regulations) without becoming eligible for FICA taxation.
5. Student employees will continue to be exempt from FICA taxation for services performed during the winter break providing the student was exempt on the last day of the fall semester and is eligible to enroll for the spring semester.
6. Student employees are exempt from FICA taxation for work performed during any period that partially falls within the academic year.
7. Student employees must be working in a student position and not a career position as defined by the IRS. A career position is more narrowly defined as one that is eligible to participate in the University’s retirement plans.

Workers Compensation
Student workers employed at Virginia Commonwealth University may be eligible for Worker’s Compensation in the event of an injury/illness arising out of and in the course of official work-related duties. If an injury/illness occurs, on the job, the employee should report the injury to his/her supervisor immediately. The supervisor and employee should contact Human Resources Worker’s Compensation Office to complete an Accident Report Form.

Student workers may be eligible for the following Worker’s Compensation insurance benefits:

1. Medical Coverage - Medical bills for treatment, therapy, and/or prescriptions resulting from a work-related injury are covered. All bills should be forwarded to the Human Resource Worker’s Compensation Office and the Occupational Health Unit on campus.
2. Lost Wages - Student employees may be eligible to receive compensation for wages lost as a result of the injury/illness after a seven-calendar day waiting period. The compensation benefit is 66 2/3% of the student worker’s average weekly wages.

Rights and Responsibilities

EACH FEDERAL WORK-STUDY STUDENT HAS THE RIGHT TO:

1. Information regarding their award amount, rate of pay, average number of work hours per week, and general FWS policies.
2. A specific job description including supervisor’s expectations and standards.
3. A clearly defined work schedule which accommodates their course schedule and academic requirements.
4. Adequate training to perform assigned tasks.
5. A safe, clean, and professional working environment.
6. Supervision and direction.
7. Instructions for recording hours worked, as well as information regarding the University’s payroll procedures and payroll calendar.
8. Instructions regarding procedures to be followed if the student cannot report for a scheduled work period.
9. A grievance procedure for stating concerns related to the award, the job, or the supervisor.

EACH FEDERAL WORK-STUDY STUDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR:
1. Maintaining enrollment in an eligible degree or certificate program.
3. Reporting any changes in enrollment to the Assistant Director of Work Study.
4. Submitting time to RealTime and the Assistant Director of Work Study if working off-campus. A supervisor MUST sign the timesheet if working off-campus, submissions can be sent to:

   Email: workstudy@vcu.edu.

   Submitted in person at:
   Grace E. Harris Hall 1015 Floyd Ave, Richmond, VA 23220

5. Adhering to their work schedule and communicating any changes or absences directly to their supervisor.
6. Understanding the specific job responsibilities, including the supervisor’s expectations and standards.
7. Completing duties as assigned and not conducting personal business at work unless authorized to do so by supervisor.
8. Dressing appropriately for the workplace.
9. Adhering to any confidentiality/security agreements set forth by employer
10. Adhering to VCU’s policies and guidelines as they pertain to discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, disability, marital status, citizenship, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected by law.

Grievances related to the above policies, to FWS awards, the job, or the supervisor may be directed to workstudy@vcu.edu.