

Employment Component Policy Brief

May 20, 2013

By: Andrew Hahn/Candace McTeer

The purpose of this policy brief is to provide a deeper understanding of the Employment Component of the Mason LIFE Program. This brief will explore the process of assigning students to worksites (both on and off campus), the Work Specialty Area upon completion of the program, the priority system established in Person Centered Meetings, and the role of families in these processes.

The LIFE Program is designed so that all students receive a wide-variety of work experiences in conjunction with their academic experiences throughout their four years at George Mason University. The idea is to provide each student with a multitude of experiences so that upon graduation each individual will be in the best position to reach their full potential as members of the work force.

The Employment Coordinator actively pursues various opportunities for both on and off campus employment based on student interests. Beginning in the spring semester of a student's first year and continuing every subsequent semester of enrollment, he or she will receive an on-campus work placement through the weekly employment class. Some of the placements include the Aquatic and Fitness Center, the Office of the President, Mail Services, the Broadside (student newspaper), among a host of others. A comprehensive list of on-campus work placements may be found in Appendix A. The placements are determined by availability, student interests discussed in Person Centered Planning meetings, and seniority. Each week, the student works at the on-campus job site for approximately ninety minutes with a one-on-one Employment Support Staff, carefully matched by the Employment Coordinator and trained in basic supported employment skills. After work, the student returns to the classroom and completes a work journal with his or her support staff; logging the progress of work skill development. Twice a semester, the student fills out a "Request for Time-Off" form and remains in the classroom during normal work time to update his or her professional portfolio, which includes resumes, skills, interests, work evidence, and supports. Also during the classroom sessions, the students participate in various activities (i.e. career development bingo or role-play of typical scenarios faced in the workplace) to emphasize and reinforce employment skills learned on the job-site. If a student is seen fit after a few weeks to work independently by his or her Employment Support Staff, the work site, the Employment Coordinator, and most importantly-the student, modifications will be made to his or her support such as providing faded support, solely travel support, or even complete independence. For example, an Employment Support Staff may travel with the student to a job placement on campus such as the Office of the President, but leave the student to do his/her work independently, while providing periodic check-ins to ensure the work is being done efficiently and accurately.

Aside from the on-campus employment experience, Mason LIFE Employment has continuous relationships with off-campus worksites such as the Jewish Community Center, the Fairfax City Public Library, Northern Virginia Family Services, Linden Resources, and Sunrise Senior Living, among many others. A comprehensive list of off-campus work placements may be found

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in Appendix B. Students are again placed in these experiences based on seniority, interest, and availability. Additionally, a student may have an interest in a certain field or employment placement, and thus the Employment Coordinator will, in conjunction with the student, pursue opportunities in said field, for example, the airport.

Finally, the Mason LIFE Program proudly offers a Congressional Hill Internship program in which students participate in an all-day internship on Capitol Hill on either Mondays or Fridays. Students and their one-on-one Employment Support Staff travel together to and from Capitol Hill via the Orange Line on the DC Metrorail. The Employment Coordinator works with the House of Representatives Administration Committee in order to place each student in one office in the morning (10:00am to 12:00pm) and a different office in the afternoon (1:00pm to 3:00pm). Students' participation in this program is granted based upon seniority and their ability to prove their reliability and work-ethic in their on-campus placements. In addition, a stipend is provided to students in their third and fourth years (not to exceed 2 semesters) by the HSC Foundation.

Beginning with the Mason LIFE Class of 2014, the certificate of completion, will demark a Work Specialty Area based upon their employment experiences, in addition to the already noted concentration. Some specialty areas that are currently being pursued are Public Works, Community Outreach, Office/Clerical, Customer Service, and Child Care. The specialty area that the student would like to explore is discussed in the mandatory Person Centered Planning meetings. During these meetings, held on Tuesdays at either 10:00am or 11:30am, the student, all component coordinators, and the student's SPED manager are present. Family members are encouraged to participate either in-person or by conference call. These meetings are most essential during the student's first and fourth year of program and may be scheduled as needed throughout their time at Mason LIFE. The purpose of the meeting is to construct a plan of action to maximize a student's growth and development to prepare him or her for future endeavors, keeping the student's wants and interests at the forefront of that plan. While family input is helpful, ultimately decisions are left in the hands of the student. During these meetings, besides discussing progress and establishing ideas for future growth in all components of the program, a priority system is established. This rank order determines which component of the program, whether a catalogue class (Exploration Component) or work experience (Employment Component), outranks the other in importance to the student in the event of scheduling conflicts.

The Mason LIFE Employment Component is designed to give all students a wide array of work experiences, both on and off campus, throughout their four years at Mason LIFE. While first choice of placement cannot be guaranteed each semester, by the end of the four years the students will not only have earned a Work Specialty Area indicated on their certificate of completion, but will also have experienced an incredibly wide variety of work placements in professional environments.

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As illustrated by Appendices A and B containing comprehensive lists of work sites, the opportunities for growth in the workplace through the Employment Component are quite numerous.

Appendix A:
On-Campus Placements

Mason Inn
Johnson Center Library: Data Entry
Johnson Center Library: Circulation
Sodexo Dining Services
The Broadside
Mail Services
Recycling
Assistive Technology Initiative
Assistive Technology Lab
Child Development Center
Print Services: Copy Center
Print Services: Front Office
Mason LIFE Office
LEAD Office
Recreation and Athletic Complex (RAC)
Aquatic and Fitness Center (AFC)
Office of Disability Services
AIM-VA (Accessible Instructional Materials)
Purchasing and Accounts Payable
Office of the President
Facilities
Center for Consciousness and Transformation
Office of Diversity and Equity

Appendix B:
Off-Campus Placements

Humane Society of Fairfax County
Alzheimer's Family Day Center
Ronald Regan National Airport: Traveler's Aid
Sunrise Senior Living
The Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia
Fairfax City Public Library
Odyssey Hospice
Northern Virginia Family Services
Fairfax Visitor Center and Museum
Linden Resources