

# FEDERAL WORK-STUDY EMPLOYER HANDBOOK



# VCU

Student Financial Services  
Financial Aid

Virginia Commonwealth  
University

Office of Financial Aid

Federal Work-Study Office

It is the responsibility of the FWS Supervisor to be familiar with the material in this guide. All questions pertaining to the Federal Work-Study program should be directed to the Assistant Director of Federal Work-Study via email at [workstudy@vcu.edu](mailto:workstudy@vcu.edu) or by phone at 804-828-6181

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## **WHAT IS FEDERAL WORK-STUDY?**

The Federal Work-Study (FWS) program provides students with part-time employment opportunities that assist them with the costs of a post-secondary education while encouraging both community service work and work related to a student’s course of study. Eligible students are awarded FWS by the Office of Financial Aid as a part of their need-based financial aid award package upon completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

The Federal Work-Study program provides eligible students the opportunity to earn funds through FWS approved positions either on-campus or off-campus. The program is also designed to provide students with opportunities for personal and professional growth and development as they begin to learn the skills that will prepare them to enter

the workforce upon graduation. Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) recognizes the unique talents and experiences students bring to the campus and we strive to provide FWS opportunities that will complement and reinforce each student's educational program or career goals.

## **AWARD AMOUNTS**

Financial Aid (FA), in accordance with federal regulations, determines a student's FWS award by considering the following:

- Funds available to the University
- Number of eligible FWS students
- Number of available positions for students

An FWS award represents the maximum amount a student may earn for the academic year or award period. The actual amount a student earns depends on the number of hours worked each week and the pay rate established by the employer. Once a student reaches their award limit, the student must stop working. Employers may request an increase of the student award, but approval is not guaranteed and is dependent on available FWS program funds. An employer may also choose to continue a student's employment as a Student Worker, however, the employer then becomes responsible for 100% of all subsequent wages earned.

## **AWARD CHANGES**

FWS awards are subject to change even after a student begins working. Students that have been authorized to work in an approved FWS position and are actively earning funds will be notified of any adjustments made to their award. FWS awards in an offered status or in an accepted status without an authorization in an approved FWS position are subject to change without notification. In the event that a student has earned more than the amount that their award has been changed to, the employing department will be charged the overage and the student position 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 a change in enrollment (credit hours) impacting the student's financial need.
  - FWS is awarded based on the assumption that the student will be full-time for the full-year. Contact the Federal Work-Study Office **immediately** if a student's enrollment status will be anything less than full-time (11 credit hours or less for undergraduate students and 8 credit hours or less for graduate students).
- Student has received an additional financial aid award or external scholarship impacting the student's financial need.
- Student has outstanding requirements from an updated FAFSA.
- 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 unenrolled semester.
  - Student must notify their supervisor and the FWS office if they have intentions to graduate mid-year.

The student is responsible for notifying their direct supervisor and the Assistant Director of Federal-Work Study regarding any possible situations from the above list as soon as possible to determine how it will impact their eligibility.

# EMPLOYER HIRING PROCESS

The hiring process is fairly simple. Please follow the steps below when hiring a student:

1. Develop the Position Description.
2. Post open position(s) to Handshake.
3. Select desired candidates for interviews.
4. Offer position to selected candidate(s).

## Step 1- Develop the Position Descriptions

Per federal guidelines, all FWS jobs must have position descriptions on file even if the position is not advertised. Under federal regulations, the position must not displace employees or impair existing service contracts. This includes the replacement of permanent staff in vacant positions. FWS positions must not involve constructing, operating, or maintaining any part of a building used for religious worship or sectarian instruction.

All positions must include:

1. Name of position (Title)
2. Classification of the position (e.g., Office Assistant 1, Office Assistant 2, etc.)
3. Name and address of the student's employer
4. Department or office in which the student will be employed
5. Location of job
6. Name of the student's supervisor
7. Purpose/role of the position within the organization
8. Duties and responsibilities
9. Rate of pay for the position
10. Hours per week
11. General qualifications for the position and specific qualifications for various levels and pay rates
12. Length of the student's employment (start and end dates)
13. Procedures for determining a student's rate of pay when position has multiple rates

**VCU Career Services will review all job descriptions based on the requirements set by FA and approve the position for posting on Handshake.**

### Step 2- Posting to Handshake

At VCU, all FWS job postings and applications are managed through the [Handshake](#) platform. In order to post an FWS position, an employer must have a Handshake account and posting permissions (provided by VCU Career Services). For more information on posting an FWS position, please visit the VCU Career Services [website](#).

Once the employer is registered through Handshake, they can begin to post positions as needed. It is important to remember that only those students who have already been awarded FWS can view FWS job postings. If an employer wishes to hire both FWS and Student Workers for the same position they must post the position twice, once as FWS and once as a Student Worker position.

When posting positions please remember the following:

- You must list your position(s) as “Temporary/Seasonal” and include your preferred start and end dates. For 2021-2022 the earliest start date is **August 10, 2021**.
- Include the following in the job description:
  1. Number of hours per week
  2. Preferred schedule (or list “flexible schedule”)
  3. Job classification, if applicable
- A contact person should be included for each position posted.
- When the position is filled, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to close the position.

### Step 3- Interviews

The screening process may begin once the position has closed and a diverse applicant pool has been achieved. Within Handshake, all students who have access to apply to an FWS position have already been awarded FWS for the current aid year. It is important to remember that a student’s FWS award is contingent upon a variety of factors and is subject to change. Employers should request that students bring a copy of their financial aid award with them to the interview to verify that they do in fact have an FWS award.

Employers can select any number of students who applied and then interview those who meet their requirements. The FWS supervisor should conduct the interviews. They can be made as formal or informal as desired; however, keeping a professional decorum is important and supervisors are encouraged to keep the interview as professional as possible.

It is the goal of the FWS program to give students the opportunity to gain real-world experience, beginning with the job search and interview process, thus preparing them to enter the workforce post-graduation.

#### Step 4- Offering the position

An offer can be made once a candidate has been selected for the position. VCU Career Services dictates that the best practice is to notify all interviewees, whether selected or not, within two weeks of the interview. This is an important teaching moment and helps students prepare for the ups and downs of the employment process, whether hired or not, especially if this is their first experience with searching for a job.

**The hiring process is slightly different from this point depending on whether you are an on-campus or off-campus work site. Please follow the steps outlined based on whether you are an on-campus or off-campus work site.**

### **ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYERS**

FWS students are able to be hired to positions both on the Monroe Park Campus and the MCV Campus. Positions include office support staff, research positions, laboratory support, tutoring, athletics support, and many more.

The FWS program will subsidize 75% of a student's wages while the institution will cover the remaining 25%. For the 2021-2022 year, individual on-campus departments will not need to contribute any funds toward the 25% institutional match.

#### Step 5- Onboarding and ePAF Process

After the hiring decision has been made, and an offer has been extended and accepted, the FWS supervisor will need to work with their department HRA/HRP to initiate the required new hire paperwork, background check, and I-9 verification. The HRA/HRP will then submit the appropriate ePAF (WSHIRE/WSCHG) for approval from the Work-Study office.

Instructions on how to complete the Work-Study New-Hire/Re-Hire (WSHIRE) ePAF can be found at the following [website](#), while instructions on how to complete the Work-Study Job Change (WSCHG) ePAF can be found at the following [website](#).

#### Step 6- ePAF Approval by the Work-Study Office

Before students can begin working, the employer must have a valid ePAF for each work-study student employed. All ePAFs must be approved by the Work-Study office before the HR Payroll system is opened for students to log their hours. During peak season (August – October), ePAFs will be approved on a daily basis (M-F). During non-peak season, ePAFs will be approved three days a week (M, W & F).

If an ePAF is not approved it will be for one of two reasons.

1. The ePAF has been completed improperly. The ePAF will be returned to the department for

corrections. A message will accompany the electronic return.

2. There was a change in the student's financial aid and the student is no longer eligible for Federal Work-Study. The Assistant Director of Federal Work-Study will contact the student and supervisor if this is the case.

### Step 7- Student can begin working

Once all the above steps have been met and the ePAF has been approved, the student may begin working. The earliest start date for the coming year is August 10, 2021. Please remember that these jobs are part-time and may not exceed 20 hours per week during periods of enrollment, and 29 hours per week during periods of non-enrollment (winter and spring breaks). Students are not permitted to work more than 8 hours per day. FA recommends that students be limited to 10-20 hours per week to ensure that the student has time to focus on their academic success.

Students are prohibited from working during their scheduled class times. It is a best practice to request a copy of the student's class schedule when determining work availability. 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.

Supervisors also are responsible for ensuring that students are working at reasonable and appropriate hours for the job position. Students working in an office setting would be expected to work between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., while a student working in a theater may work during the evening. Whatever the hours, the students must be supervised at all times. Work hours are monitored by FA to ensure compliance.

For more information about Work Schedules, please see the Work Schedule section of this handbook.



# OFF-CAMPUS EMPLOYERS

Eligible FWS students have the opportunity to work with off-campus non-profits, local schools, and government agencies. The FWS program will subsidize 75% of a student's wages, while the institution covers the remaining 25%. At this point, there is no requirement that off-campus employers provide any funds from their own budget to subsidize the wages of an FWS student. To ensure program integrity, supervisors must monitor the cumulative hours worked and remaining hours of an FWS student.

Organizations interested in pursuing an FWS partnership with VCU must contact the Federal Work-Study office at [workstudy@vcu.edu](mailto:workstudy@vcu.edu). Our office will provide interested partners with an initial Off-Campus Employer Questionnaire that will need to be completed and submitted for review. The Assistant Director of Federal Work-Study will then follow up with interested organizations to schedule a telephone interview to help determine whether an organization is a proper fit for the FWS program. The Assistant Director of Federal Work-Study will provide approved organizations an Off-Campus Employer Agreement. **The original agreement must be returned by mail, along with a copy of IRS documentation confirming an organization's non-profit status. E-mailed or faxed copies will not be accepted. Employers must have an agreement in place before hiring any students as FWS employees.**

## Welcome Packet

VCU will provide approved off-campus employers with a Welcome Packet that will provide instructions and materials to be used for FWS employment. The Welcome packet will include:

- **The Off-Campus Agreement** – A copy of the fully-executed, signed agreement for your records.
- **VCU Payroll Schedule** – The document will provide the dates that timesheets are due to [workstudy@vcu.edu](mailto:workstudy@vcu.edu).
- **Employer Handbook** – for the organization to keep as a reference. All employers must read it.
- **Student Handbook** – currently being updated and will be provided to the employer to keep as a reference in the near future.
- **FWS Student Award Tracker link** – for tracking of student hours and FWS award usage.

## Step 5- Onboarding

After the hiring decision has been made, and an offer has been extended and accepted, the Off-Campus site supervisor will need to fill out and submit a New Hire Request form which can be found on the Federal Work-Study [website](#). Once received, the Federal Work-Study office will contact the student to initiate the hiring process that includes new hire paperwork, a background check, and I-9 verification. A student may not begin working until the Assistant Director of Federal Work-Study has provided the student and employer with proper notification that they have cleared all hiring requirements.

As with any new job, it is important for supervisors to onboard student employees to ensure a clear understanding of the company's work requirements, security protocols, dress code or other important items that assist the new employee with assimilation into your work area. The student employee is part of your workforce and should be held to the same work standards that you expect of your permanent employees.

Off-campus employers may not require a student to become a member of any organization or charge a fee for services to work at the agency. In addition, students are to be provided with all necessary computer equipment, software, security access, training or materials to accomplish their job duties. A student is not required to utilize their own computer or software to perform their job.

## Step 6- Payroll Setup Process

VCU handles the payroll setup process for off-campus employers. Students are notified to visit the Student Financial Management Center in Grace E. Harris Hall to complete and submit all of their payroll paperwork and eligibility to work documents.

## Step 7- Student can begin working

An email notification will be sent out to both the student and employer notifying them that the student has been authorized to work and the earliest date they can begin. The earliest start date for the coming year is August 10, 2021. Please remember that these jobs are part-time and may not exceed 20 hours per week during periods of enrollment, and 29 hours per week during periods of non-enrollment (winter and spring breaks). Students are not permitted to work more than 8 hours per day. FA recommends that students be limited to 10-20 hours per week to ensure that the student has time to focus on their academic success.

Students are prohibited from working during their scheduled class times. It is a best practice to request a copy of the student's class schedule when determining work availability. 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.

Supervisors also are responsible for ensuring that students are working at reasonable and appropriate hours for the job position. Students working in an office setting would be expected to work between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., while a student working in a theater may work during the evening. Whatever the hours, the students must be supervised at all times. Work hours are monitored by FA to ensure compliance.

For more information about Work Schedules, please see the Work Schedule section of this handbook.

## **WAGES AND PAY INCREASES**

Hourly wages for FWS jobs are based on the duties and responsibilities of the position. Employers will determine the pay rate of the FWS employee by also considering the student's skills and experience. For highly specialized or technical skills, pay rates may be higher. Please keep in mind that the overall FWS award does not increase and that higher pay rates reduces the number of available hours the student may work under FWS. For example, a student with a \$3,000 award can work 250 hours at a pay rate of \$12/hour and only 200 hours at a pay rate at \$15/hour. In all cases, no student will be paid less than the Federal or State minimum wage, whichever is greatest.

Hourly wages can vary anywhere from \$9.50 to \$15.00 per hour. Pay rates above \$15 per hour must first be approved and documented by the Assistant Director of Federal Work-Study.

Please keep in mind that the Virginia General Assembly approved legislation to increase the minimum wage from \$9.50/hour to \$11/hour effective January 1, 2022. In an effort to proactively prepare for the change, the FWS office highly recommends, but cannot require until January 1, that the minimum wage for FWS students be established at \$11/hour. This recommendation is to help support and emphasize the proper planning that is required by students, managers/supervisors, and HR personnel as it pertains to setting appropriate work schedules, tracking the numbers of hours worked, and monitoring the overall earnings of a student.

Pay increases should be given when it is determined that the student has been there for at least one year of time or the student's role in the department has gained further responsibilities. The length of time in between increases is determined by the supervisor/department. If the student's responsibilities have increased then a new position description should be written up and submitted through Handshake.

## WORK SCHEDULE

It is up to the supervisor and student to agree upon a work schedule for the student. The student must make every possible effort to adhere to the schedule. If anything should come up, it is up to the student to discuss this with their supervisor.

**Students must not work more than eight hours in one day.** It is the policy of the FWS program that a paid fifteen-minute break is allowed for every continuous four hours worked. Breaks are not provided for periods of less than four hours. Breaks cannot be used to arrive late or leave early. A 30-minute unpaid meal break must be taken for shifts of six hours or more of consecutive work. Students and supervisors need to monitor the number of hours they work each term in order to not exceed the FWS amount awarded.

Supervisors can use the FWS Student Award Tracker to keep track of their students' hours worked and earnings. The tracker can be downloaded from the FWS website. If needed supervisors can contact the FWS staff for assistance.

When creating a work schedule with the student it is important to remember:

- The student's work schedule should not interfere with their class schedule.
- Once the schedule is set it should be carefully followed.
- Students are responsible for adhering to their work schedule and should be paid **only** for hours worked.
- If the student is unable to come to work, the student must notify the supervisor in advance.
- If a supervisor is not able to host a student for work whether for an office closure, holiday etc., it is the responsibility of the employer to notify the student in a timely manner.
- During final exams and midterms supervisors must accommodate the student's study/exam schedule.

Students cannot be paid for hours worked when it is determined that they should have been attending classes during that time. Employers will be held responsible for reimbursing the FWS program for earnings determined to be ineligible. It is recommended that supervisors ask for a copy of the student's class schedule, as to ensure that students do not work when they should be in class.

## TIMESHEETS, PAYMENT AND RECORDKEEPING

FWS earnings are not credited to a student's account to pay institutional charges, but are paid directly to the student. Earned funds will be paid to the student via direct deposit to the student's bank account on a semi-monthly

basis in accordance with 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.

Students that participate in the FWS program are required to log their time in RealTime, a timekeeping system that tracks hours worked and used for payroll purposes. Clocking in and out accurately will help prevent any delays or inaccuracies in pay.

At any time during the fiscal year, the Assistant Director of Federal Work-Study or the Associate Director of Compliance and Reporting may audit supervisors for verification on reported hours for any FWS student employee. Supervisors must keep a record of all the hours worked per pay period and are responsible for knowing how the number of hours worked affects the use of the FWS award.

### **1. On-Campus Students**

- 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 shift. Any issues with RealTime or if adjustments need to be made should be reported to the student's direct supervisor. Supervisors must approve time worked by the student(s) in RealTime when required by the VCU payroll schedule.

### **2. Off-Campus Students**

- Students that work off-campus through FWS are also required to clock in using the RealTime system upon arrival, clock out and in for breaks, and clock out at the end of their work shift. Site supervisors must also keep record of their student's hours. Issues with RealTime or if adjustments need to be made should be reported to the Assistant Director of Federal Work-Study via email at [workstudy@vcu.edu](mailto:workstudy@vcu.edu)
- Off-campus students are required to submit a signed copy of their timesheet at the end of each pay period to their site supervisor. The site supervisor must review and sign the timesheet ensuring it is accurate. Once both signatures have been obtained, the site supervisor will submit the timesheet to the Assistant Director of Federal Work-Study via email at [workstudy@vcu.edu](mailto:workstudy@vcu.edu). Failure to adhere to this requirement may result in delays to a student's pay.

## **OVER AWARDS**

Although it is the responsibility of the student and supervisor to keep track of a student's earnings, sometimes an over award does occur. The FWS staff also monitors earnings to determine if an over award has occurred. If an over award does occur a reallocation of VCU departmental funds may be needed.

Before a reallocation is done within your on-campus department, please email the FWS staff at

[workstudy@vcu.edu](mailto:workstudy@vcu.edu) to determine the appropriate course of action.

As previously discussed, in some instances, students may stay employed on FWS:

- If the student has unmet need left and there are still FWS funds available to cover the overage.
- A student's financial aid budget may be adjusted to increase the student's eligibility so that the over award may be eliminated.

Financial Aid will use institutional funds to cover the overage for off-campus students, however, the student will be terminated from their position immediately and will need to cease working promptly. Failure of the off-campus supervisor to monitor the student's hours and earning can result in the discontinuation of its relationship with VCU as an off-campus FWS employer.

## **CONCURRENT EMPLOYMENT**

Students cannot hold more than one FWS job at a time at VCU. Supervisors must notify FA when a student is terminated or voluntarily quits their job. It is important that changes in employment are reported to FA Work Study staff no more than two days after a student leaves their job.

If a student wishes to switch positions, they must first quit their previous position before starting the new one. FA will need to create a new work-study position to ensure proper crediting of work-study earnings to the appropriate job. Notification must be sent to the FWS office before the student may begin working in the new position. It is suggested that position switches occur at the end of a payroll period.

## **RESIGNATION AND TERMINATIONS**

Most FWS students remain in the same job or with the same employer for the academic year. However, sometimes students may find it necessary to change jobs for various reasons. It will be the student's responsibility to seek other job opportunities in Handshake if he/she wishes to change employers. 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.

FA understands that terminating students can be difficult for both the student and the supervisor. We ask that before a student is terminated, they be warned and asked to rectify their behavior. If the issue is not corrected within a timely manner, a termination may be suitable; however, the OFA understands that there are instances that merit an immediate termination without a warning period. Terminations should be reported to the FWS office by completing and submitting a Termination Request which can be found on the FWS website.

## **ACADEMIC CREDIT AND FWS**

At this time, there are no Federal Work Study jobs that provide academic credit while working in an FWS position. Students working on a Capstone project in their senior year may not be paid for their personal research time. In addition, students are not permitted to complete class assignments or study for exams while working at their job.

## **GRADUATING STUDENTS**

For students who will be graduating in fall, spring or summer: Their last day of work is on their last day of classes in their final semester. The student employee must be terminated immediately and no longer allowed to work using FWS funds.

If the student continues to work after their last eligible day, either the student or department must reimburse the earned monies as soon as possible.

# **TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF FEDERAL WORK-STUDY: EMPLOYERS/SUPERVISORS**

- The employer or supervisor should provide the student with a detailed job description and sufficient training to function effectively on the job.
- The employer/designated supervisor should establish and maintain a regular work schedule based upon the student's class schedule and the needs of the employer.
- The employer should make every effort to give the student sufficient work/hours so the FWS award may be earned.
- The employer/supervisor must ensure the student does **not** work during times when it is determined the student should be in class.
- The employer must notify the FWS office, in writing, whenever a change is made: revision of job descriptions, change in pay rate, position termination, change in supervisor, etc.
- The employer may be asked to evaluate a student's work performance at the end of the award period. The evaluation criteria will be productivity, dependability, attitude, initiative, attendance, and relationships with coworkers.
- The employer/supervisor agrees to all regulations stated in the Employer and Student Handbooks.
- VCU has the right to terminate any FWS position due to changes in the availability of FWS funds or due to changes in the student status that could affect continued eligibility for financial aid.
- Failure of the student or the employer to abide by VCU policies and procedures, and unsatisfactory performance are grounds for termination from the FWS program.
- Students may not work more than 20 hours per week during the fall and spring semesters and no more than 29 hours per week during a period of non-enrollment.
- Students may not work more than 8 hours in one day, and must take a 30-minute break when working six or more hours.
- Supervisors are responsible for tracking work hours and the usage of the FWS award during the year. Over-expenditures of the award will require the employer to reimburse the FWS fund.
- The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 prohibits employers from accepting voluntary services from any paid employee. Any student employed under FWS must be paid for all hours worked.
- Overtime payment: FWS is designed as a part-time program so overtime should be avoided at all costs.



