

FEDERAL WORK-STUDY STUDENT HANDBOOK



VCU

Student Financial Services
Financial Aid

Virginia Commonwealth University
Office of Financial Aid
Federal Work-Study Office

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Overview

The Federal Work-Study (FWS) program is a part-time employment program available to assist students in meeting the costs of a post-secondary education while encouraging both community service work and work related to the 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 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.

This handbook is designed to provide 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 program. Cooperation and adherence to the regulations set forth in this handbook are essential for the continuation of the Federal Work-Study program. Failure to comply with these guidelines could result in termination from the program.

The Office of Financial Aid is committed to providing quality customer service, while adhering to Federal, State, and University guidelines. Questions concerning the Federal Work-Study program should be directed to the Assistant Director of Federal Work-Study via:

Phone: (804) 828-6181
Email: workstudy@vcu.edu

*Information contained in this handbook is subject to change based on changes to federal regulations.

Applying for FWS

To apply for Federal Work-Study, students must complete and submit a [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) (FAFSA). Priority will be given to students that complete and file the FAFSA application by the priority deadline. Please refer to the [Federal Student Aid Contact Center](#) for assistance regarding the FAFSA form.

All students will receive an electronic award letter from the Office of Financial Aid notifying them of their financial aid package, which may be viewed on [eServices](#). These notifications will indicate if a student has received an FWS award and the award amount for the award year.

Eligibility for FWS

The Office of Financial Aid, as administrator of the FWS Program, determines FWS eligibility and awards based on the student's remaining financial need. Financial need is determined after the student completes the 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 all 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 half-time (6 credits for undergraduate students and 4.5 credits for graduate students).

Award Amounts

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. If an FWS student works for a VCU department, the department may consider continuing their employment as a Student Worker. However, this requires the student's earnings to be paid 100% by the department. Any unearned funds at the end of the academic year will be forfeited.

Federal Work-Study 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.
 - Immediately contact the Federal Work Study Office to inform them of any new, incoming scholarships.
- 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.

Obtaining an 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, upload and store documents, access specialized resources, and connect with staff members from VCU Career Services.

First-time students (freshmen and new transfers) must first be registered (enrolled in classes) for the upcoming semester. Registration typically occurs during [New Student Orientation](#). Once registered, students will be able to create a Handshake account and begin viewing and applying for FWS positions as they are posted.

Students are not guaranteed to obtain an FWS position. However, we encourage students to be as proactive as possible when seeking and applying for FWS opportunities. This includes using [Career Services](#) as an instrumental resource in developing a resume and cover letter and excellent tips to keep in mind during a job interview.

Types of Jobs

1. **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.

2. **Off-Campus FWS**

- Students interested in this option may apply for a job with one of our many non-profit 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.

FWS positions offer a flexible work schedule to accommodate students' course schedules. Some off-campus site locations may not be within walking distance from campus; however, students have access to public transportation such as the GRTC Transit System, GRTC Pulse, and RamRide.

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. A student may not begin working until receiving confirmation that all the hiring steps have been completed and that they are cleared to begin working.

1. 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. Financial Aid **highly recommends** that a student work between 10-20 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.
 - o 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 over the 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 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.

2. Breaks

- Students are allowed a paid 15-minute break for every continuous four hours worked.
- A 30-minute unpaid meal break must be taken for shifts of six hours or more of consecutive work.
- Breaks are not provided for periods of less than four hours.
- Breaks cannot be used to arrive late or leave early.

Timekeeping with RealTime

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.

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.

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. 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
- 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. Failure to adhere to this requirement may result in delays to a student's pay.

Federal Work-Study students may not falsify to their employer the number of hours worked. If a student is found to have falsified hours, employment may be terminated and the student may be terminated from participating in the program moving forward.

Student Pay Rates, Earnings, and Payroll

Pay rates for FWS jobs are based on the duties and responsibilities of the position. Employers will determine the pay rate of the student employee by also considering the student's skills and experience. For highly specialized or technical skills, pay rates may be higher. In all cases, no student will be paid less than the Federal/and or State minimum wage.

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 may not continue working once they have reached the end of the authorized period of employment, graduated, or reached their FWS award limit, whichever comes first. 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 earnings beyond the authorized award.

Resignation/Termination

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.

*Please note that students are unable to hold multiple FWS positions at the same time, nor are they able to hold a faculty/staff position along with a FWS position. *

FWS employers may terminate FWS students at any time for unsatisfactory performance, however, it is asked that employers give the student ample warning and a chance to correct the problem before resorting to 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 various outlets.

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.

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.
2. Maintaining Satisfactory Academic Progress.
3. Reporting any changes in enrollment to the Assistant Director of Work Study.
4. Submitting time as outlined based on your position on-campus or off-campus.
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 the Assistant Director of Federal Work-Study at workstudy@vcu.edu

