

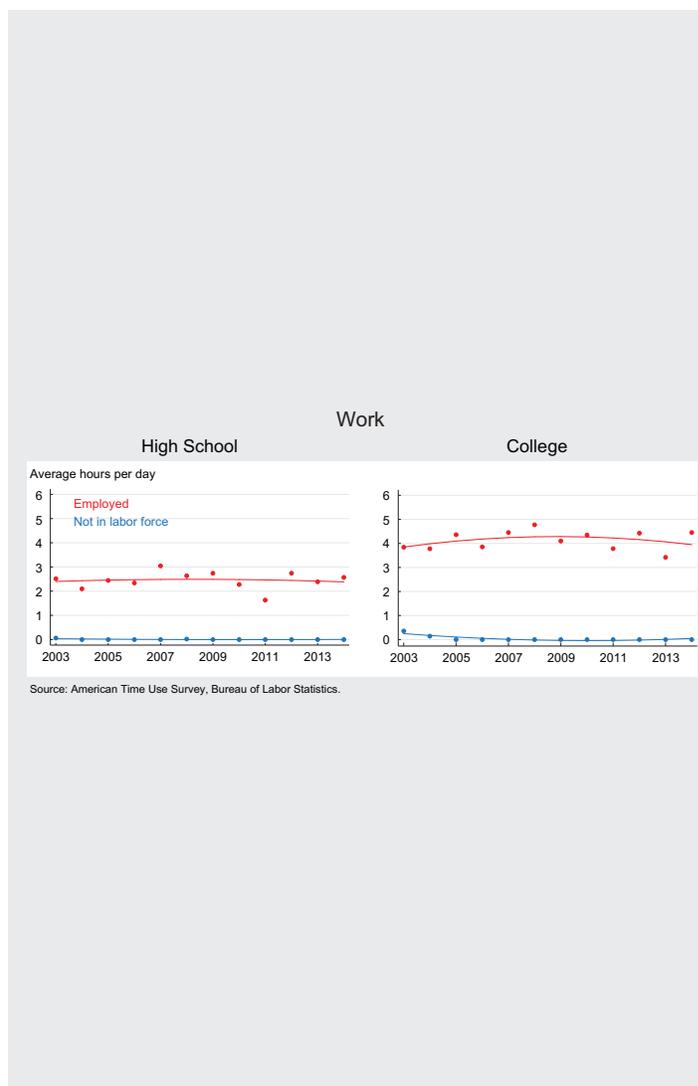
Student Employment and Time Use

Dionissi Aliprantis and Anne Chen

Labor economists have long been interested in the effects of employment on students' academic and labor market outcomes. Theoretically, employment while in school could help or hurt outcomes. On the one hand, it might take up too much time and energy, reducing the time students have for homework and studying. On the other hand, it might help students focus, improve their time management, or provide them with specific job skills. While this is not an easy question to answer, we can begin to explore the issue by comparing the amount of time that employed and unemployed students spend on homework and other activities.

Data on how students spend their time is available from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS). Of the respondents in the ATUS sample, roughly 55,000 over the 2003 to 2014 survey period report as full-time students. Of this subsample, we keep those between the ages of 13 and 25 to capture traditionally high school- and college-aged respondents, which gives us just over 21,000 students. We estimate changes in mean time trends by calculating the average time use per activity by the survey year.

ATUS shows that students with jobs tend to work between 2 and 3 hours a weekday while in high school,

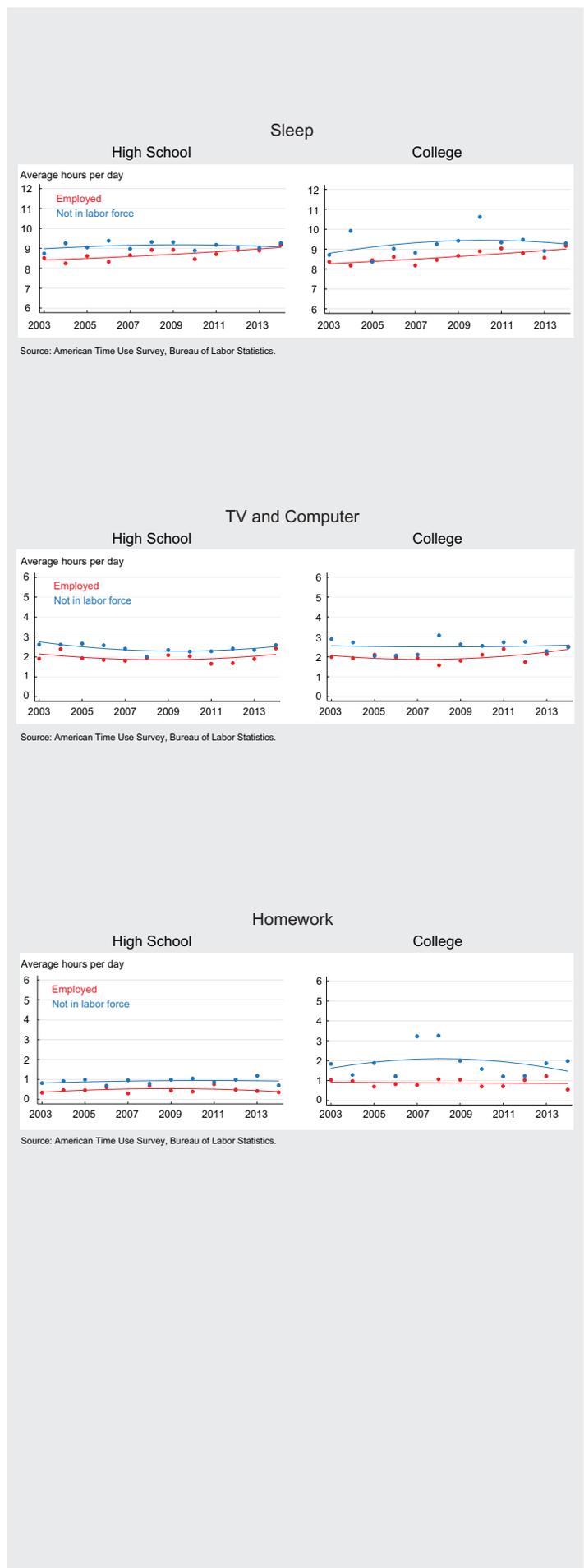


and between 4 and 5 hours per weekday while in college. This is a nontrivial amount of time devoted to employment..

Where do employed students get the time they spend at work? One large part comes from time not spent sleeping or on electronic devices like computers and TVs for leisure. Employed students tend to sleep between 30 and 60 minutes less every weekday than their unemployed counterparts and spend roughly 30 fewer minutes on TV and computers.

But the time employed students spend working also seems to come at the expense of homework. Students not in the labor force tend to spend between 20 and 40 minutes more on homework every weekday than their employed counterparts. This difference can be as large as the amount of time employed students spend on homework, which suggests that even small increases in the time spent on homework could be beneficial to employed students. While this analysis cannot say whether employed students would have spent this additional time on homework if they were not employed, the evidence from the ATUS does show that employment is clearly related to time spent on homework.

These data have shown that it is an open question as to whether working while in school helps or hurts students' long-term outcomes. If working did not reduce the time students spent studying, it would be difficult to imagine that working could significantly disadvantage students. But since the ATUS data clearly show that working students do in fact spend less time studying than their nonworking counterparts, it remains to be seen whether there are advantages to working while in school and whether they outweigh any disadvantages. Given the potential impact of working while in school on students' educational attainment and labor market outcomes, fully characterizing the advantages and disadvantages is a subject worthy of further study.





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