



## BALANCING ACT

### Most ODU students juggle jobs with classwork, survey finds

BY PHILIP WALZER THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

NORFOLK — Threequarters of Old Dominion University's students juggle classes and work, according to a survey done by a sociology professor.

Fifty-eight percent work at least 21 hours a week, and 35 percent work more than 30 hours .

"My sense was that students were working a lot, but I was surprised by how much people were working," said Lucien X. Lombardo, a professor of sociology and criminal justice. "We can say we would like students not to have to work, but that's not going to be the reality unless someone's willing to pay for it."

Lombardo, along with part-time professor Leon Bouvier and their students in a research class, surveyed about 900 ODU students. Most attend the Norfolk campus, but about 300 take distance-learning classes.

ODU does not track the percentage of students who work. In 2003, the U.S. government estimated the percentage for all college students at 78 percent, said Jacqueline E. King, an analyst with the American Council on Education.

Lombardo said the results of his survey show the strains of juggling work, school and family life.

Students were split almost evenly on whether they had problems balancing it all. Thirty-eight percent said their physical health had suffered, and roughly half said their grades had suffered.

Students worked more and reported more stress as they moved from freshman to senior year.

"It's always an adventure," said Benicia B. Hernandez , a senior from Norfolk majoring in human services . "Something always gets sacrificed."

She has nearly a full course load, at 12 credit hours. She works nearly full time – 32 hours a week – as a floor supervisor and waitress at Piccadilly Cafeteria on Military Highway. She's also the single mother of three children, ages 3 to 12 .

"If I put too much into my school, if I have a lot of papers to write, then the time with my children is sacrificed," said Hernandez, 28. "If I find out my daughter has a bad grade, that means my time to study is sacrificed."

Hernandez hasn't dropped any major balls. She has a Bplus average. Her mother and her children's father help with child care.

She doesn't miss any of her children's sporting events. She even gets seven hours of sleep most nights.

The one area where she feels a major sacrifice: her personal life.

"I don't go out to movies," she said. "I don't hang out with my friends. I don't go to clubs."

She crafts detailed daily schedules of everything she needs to do, from cooking to studying. "I have to literally manage my time to the hour."

The restaurant's flexibility also helps. Piccadilly schedules her shifts around her class schedule, Hernandez said, so she can take morning courses and work afternoons and evenings.

"It's a simple philosophy: We try to do the right thing by our employees," said Bill Sprenger, the general manager of the restaurant.

Seventy-seven percent of the students in the survey said their employers offer flexible schedules. But that doesn't always happen.

Last semester, Charles K. Glover, a 19-year-old sophomore from Suffolk, asked the restaurant he worked at for time off during the weekends to study. "Occasionally they granted it," he said, "but a lot of times they didn't. They run a business, and that's their

peak time.”

Now Glover works at a different restaurant.

Myk Kahl of Norfolk solved the scheduling problem by becoming his own boss. He had worked for a company for 10½ years as a carpeting inspector. Last year, he quit to become a self-employed consultant.

“If I didn’t have the flexibility to decide when to make my appointments, I wouldn’t have the ability to go back to school,” said Kahl, 35, a freshman studying international business.

Relatively few students – 20 percent – receive tuition reimbursement from their employers. Sprenger said Piccadilly does not offer that benefit.

The study also portrayed students as generally satisfied with ODU’s accommodations. For instance, 82 percent characterized professors as sometimes or always flexible.

“I think they’re very flexible when it comes to meeting students,” Hernandez said.

Glover agreed: “If you had a situation, all of my professors would work with you.”

Eighty-seven percent said classes were sometimes or always easy to fit in their schedules.

Some of the surveyed students complained of a shortage of night classes. However, Glover said, “I’ve gone on campus at 8 at night; there are tons of classes going on.”

About 384 classes – or 12 percent of the total – begin after 6 p.m., spokeswoman Jennifer Mullen said.

ODU’s provost, Thomas L. Isenhour, pointed to other innovations, including the Teletechnet distance learning program and the growth of weekend classes.

“Certainly we cannot accommodate every person every time they want to be accommodated,” Isenhour said, “but we continuously adjust the schedule for as many folks as we can.”

Lombardo hopes the report will prod further action. “This is a reality we have to start to think about and start to cope with,” he said.



**CHRIS TYREE/THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT** Benicia B. Hernandez wipes up after customers at the Piccadilly Cafeteria on Military Highway in Norfolk. The Old Dominion University senior says her bosses at the restaurant have been flexible in helping her schedule her work hours around her classes.