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## Review

# Extracurricular Activities and Academic Achievement: A Literature Review

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**This paper explores the literature on the relationship between extracurricular activities and academic achievement of college students. Some studies support that extracurricular activities can negatively impact student performance. Other studies emphasize the positive effect of student engagement in activities out of the classroom. However, they point that not all activities are beneficial to academic growth, and the benefits of student engagement vary across activities. There are polemics on the effect of Greek Letter Organizations. Some benefits include leadership development, increase in self-esteem, and attachment to the institution. Major-related activities provide good student satisfaction and higher academic performance.**

**Keywords:** Extracurricular Activities, Academic Achievement, Literature Review, Students.

## INTRODUCTION

Student success is defined by many factors; among them are academic achievement, involvement in activities out of the classroom, socio-economic background, pre-college academic achievement and performance after graduation from college (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). The relationship between extracurricular activities and academic achievement of college students is a topic open to polemics. Several research studies have linked engagement in extracurricular activities to low academic performance (Mehus, 1932, Dunkelberger, 1935), other studies support the positive effect of

extracurricular activities on student performance (Kuh et al., 2008). However, many studies found that not all activities out of classroom settings are beneficial to student success; some enhance performance, whereas others are distractions from academic work (Broh, 2002; Mehus, 1934, & Baker 2008). The purpose of this paper is to explore the literature on extracurricular activities and student achievement.

## Do Extracurricular Activities affect Student Performance?

According to Mehus (1932) low academic performance is

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influenced by factors other than participation in extracurricular activities. The author analyzed the scholarship quotients and intelligence scores of students from the University of Minnesota and Wittenberg College; the scholarship quotient was obtained through a division of the number of quality points by the number of credit hours and the intelligence scores are results from different standardized tests. The findings of Mehus (1932) suggested that the more active students are the better they performed academically; both genders considered as well as freshman and sophomore male students and freshman women. However, junior men and senior women have a lower scholarship quotient than those students who were involved in two or three extracurricular activities, which could be explained according to Mehus (1932) by their low standardized test scores. Further investigation is needed in that area but involvement in extracurricular activities does not always justify low academic performance; it all depends on the student (Mehus, 1932).

Dunkelberger (1935) also tested the assumption that extracurricular activities in college hinder positive academic performance because they occupy the time students should devote to studying. The study was conducted at Susquehanna University and data showed that twelve percent of the students enrolled were not involved in any extracurricular activities, which could be explained by the fact that they lived off-campus. The study compared the grade point average (GPA) of students who were involved in some type of educationally purposeful activity to those who were not involved in any. The comparison of freshman students with no activity to those who reported three extracurricular activities showed that the latter had higher GPAs; the comparison of sophomores, juniors, and seniors yielded the same results.

However, students who were not working had higher GPAs than those who had to work; likewise students who were not involved in sports performed better than athletes (Dunkelberger, 1935). Mehus (1934) states that female students who work and study have lower grades, but male students who have to work perform better academically. Like Mehus (1932), Dunkelberger (1935) supports that extracurricular activities are not the cause of low academic performance except in the case of athletes who experience frequent absences from class due to trips to participate in games.

### **Do All Extracurricular Activities Provide the Same Benefit?**

Involvement in extracurricular activities strengthens the ties of students to the school they are enrolled in. Therefore, it is important that academic institutions enhance such activities for retention purposes, when students are engaged and feel some type of connection

with the school; they are more likely stay in the same institution (Baker, 2008). Baker (2008) continues to point though that not all activities provide the same type of support for better student integration; some activities enhance academic achievement while other hinder it (Broh, 2002). Aitken (1982) developed a multi-equation model to determine retention based on student satisfaction academically and in terms of living conditions, performance and retention at the University of Massachusetts; the results though showed that involvement in extracurricular activities was not significant for student retention.

Broh (2002) conducted a secondary analysis of data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 to find the effect of extracurricular activities on high-school achievement; the findings suggested that sports are good extracurricular activities for student development and socialization between students, parents and schools. Sports increase self-esteem (Broh, 2002), especially for black students (Baker, 2008), but self-esteem is not significant in influencing student grades (Broh, 2002). Mehus (1934) suggests that students who engage in oratory and debate activities, publication and departmental clubs tend to perform better academically than those involved in athletics, music and drama. The difference in academic achievement between male students who were actively involved in fraternities and those who were not was not significant. But, women in sororities performed better than those who were not, the same applies to male and female students who were involved in religious activities.

Baker (2008) claims that although there is large body of evidence supporting the positive effects of extracurricular activities on academic achievement, it does not identify the effect of different types of organizations on academic performance of minorities, in particular African-American students (Little, 2002) and Latino students. Transition to college life is more difficult for minority students; therefore organizations and activities out of classroom settings represent a support system that facilitates transition. Since not all organizations have a positive effect on academics, it is important to identify them especially when dealing with Black Colleges and underrepresented students (Little, 2002 & Baker, 2008).

The topic of extracurricular activities of Black college students is a topic that is understudied although these activities are an important aspect of the undergraduate phase (Little, 2002). Little (2002) states that the development of extracurricular activities in Black colleges at the end of the Civil War was somewhat similar to those activities in White schools because missionaries who engaged in education in these institutions were also teachers in- or had graduated from White schools and they intended to provide to Black students the same experience as their White counterparts. Extracurricular activities in Black colleges as well as in the White ones emerged from the need to provide some type of

entertainment after long hours of classical and religious studying; entertainment was even more urgent for black institutions as these were rather confined to rural areas during segregation. Debating clubs started to emerge such as the Union Literary Society from Fisk University. Later on in 1881, Beta Kappa Beta was created. These literary societies were usually named after some well-known freedom activist or other personalities and great thinkers from Ancient Greece or Rome (Little, 2002).

Kuh et al (2008) investigated the impact of student involvement in educationally purposeful activities on academic performance and retention during the freshman year and also how they affect students from different ethnic groups. The data used was from the NSSE surveys conducted in eighteen four-year degree-granting colleges that consisted of Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), Historically Black College Institutions (HBCUs) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). The variables considered on this study: student background such as ACT scores, student engagement, and academic and financial aid information. The findings of the study suggested that there is a positive correlation between student participation in ECAs and academic achievement. Extracurricular activities influence students' grades during the freshman year and their likelihood to remain in the same school the following year; this is valid for all races and genders.

Students with disabilities and minorities get even more benefits from ECAs than White students do. Therefore institutions should really emphasize educationally purposeful activities, especially for students presenting more risks of dropping out early. Student academic background such as ACT and SAT scores influences freshman academic performance and likelihood to stay in college (Kuh et al., 2008); freshman grades strongly influence performance during sophomore year of male and female minority students (Baker, 2008). But as the students immerse in college life and get various experiences, the influence of their academic background decreases. Academic institutions can influence student involvement in educationally purposeful activities through freshman seminars, service learning, and community service and also know prospective student backgrounds in order to design early intervention strategies with clear definition of standard and expectations during recruitments and enrollment for better chances of retention (Kuh et al., 2008).

Flaugher and Rock (1969) used a multiple moderator approach to identify academic performance of students in college. They classified students as overachievers or underachievement based on their High School Rank, SAT scores and their grades as freshman. The multiple approach technique consisted in identify a maximum of five variables that characterized students who performed very well academically and those who did poorly. The variables considered as impacting freshman grade point average (GPA) included father's education, size of town

of origin of the student, and amount of student activity outside classroom setting. The main variable significant in influencing overachievers' grades was father's education, whereas underachievers reflected high interest in extracurricular activities and came from small towns. Poor performance in this study could be the result of "culture shock" or distraction by activities outside classroom settings; further research is needed though using the multiple moderator approach for generalization purposes.

Baker (2008) researched the effect of different types of organizations on academic performance of underrepresented students, African-American and Latino students at twenty-seven higher education institutions. The study was based on two frameworks: Ogbu's theory of oppositional culture and Tinto's theory of educational departure. Tinto's theory of educational departure argues that in order for students to perform well academically and persist in the same institution, there must be some type of connection with the institution. Critics of Tinto's theory state that the theory does not consider aspects of race, class or gender (Tierney, 1992 as cited in Baker, 2008).

Ogbu's theory of oppositional culture argues that there are two types of minorities: voluntary minorities and involuntary minorities who are in this study African-Americans and Latinos due to historical circumstances. Involuntary minorities will not engage in activities that represent the values of the dominant class. If they do engage in them, they will not do well or will develop mechanisms against them. A study by Jenkins et al. (2004 as cited in Baker, 2008) on the academic achievement of voluntary immigrants and other black students support Ogbu's theory. Masey et al. (2003) tested the theory but did not find it significant for freshman adolescents; the findings in Baker (2008) do not support Ogbu's theory of oppositional culture either. Identification to a specific ethnic group influence performance of black females, but black males are influenced by household income. Racial composition of organizations does not have a significant effect on academic performance of Black male and female students, and Latinos. However, student grades vary according to the type of extracurricular activity they participate in.

Among student organizations, athletic organizations are the most famous. A high population of minority male students practices them and they do influence college enrollment. However, involvement in athletics does not yield the same effect in academics for all types of students across races and genders. Eitzen (2003 as cited in Baker, 2008) states that female or White student athletes are more likely to graduate than those students who are not involved in extracurricular activities and also Black football and basketball players. Baker's study though found that athletics did not have a significant positive or negative effect on student grades, except for

Latina students; varsity sports though that are more time-consuming could have a strong effect on academic performance.

Participation in religious organizations did not have any effect on academic performance because according to Baker (2008) participants already had religious values before enrolling in college. Involvement in political organizations strongly correlated positively with academic achievement for all groups of students, but it was less significant for Black female students. Students who participate in political organizations have better self-esteem and feel empowered, those who were involved in minority-based organizations have a positive identity; arts positively influenced academic achievement of Black students. Involvement in Greek letter organizations was the only activity that had a negative correlation with academic achievement for all groups of underrepresented students, except for Latinas in Baker's study.

### **Greek Letter Organizations and Academic Achievement**

Although Greek letter organizations in their policies commit to high standards and expectations from their members, several issues have been raising controversies such as alcohol abuse, low academic performance, hazing, cheating, to name a few (Shonrock, 1998 & Baker, 2008). Greek letter organizations have their own standards and expectations but chapters must abide by the standards and policies of each academic institution. Shonrock (1998) discussed a few policy documents that student affairs officials can use to improve collaboration and cooperation with Greek letter organizations regarding their standards and expectations within the framework of the mission of academic institutions. Among those documents are the Miami Model for Greek Excellence at Miami University, Greek Life: A Foundation for the Future from the University of Maryland at College Park, Standards and Guidelines for Fraternity and Sorority Advising: Self-Assessment Guide, and the Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms. Shonrock (1998) emphasized that student affairs officials can access important documents about fraternities and sororities from their headquarters although some of the practices of these chapters are secret; this would help to keep them accountable for their standards such as academic achievement and hazing issues.

However, there are many opportunities when students get involved in Greek letter organizations such as networking and socializing opportunities (Strapp & Farr, 2010), and most of the time those who join them get committed for the rest of their life (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). Kimbrough & Hutcheson (1998)

investigated the impact of Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGOs) on leadership development. They found that BGOs have a positive effect on student involvement in college and leadership development, self-esteem and confidence regardless of student previous experience in leadership in high school or before they joined the organization. Students in BGOs get involved in several other activities in college apart from the ones within fraternities or sororities. Kimbrough & Hutcheson (1998) insist that student affairs administrators should continue to investigate the effects of BGOs on leadership skill development despite the controversies because highly active students get more satisfaction from their institution; they perform well and are less likely to drop out (Astin, 1984 as cited in Kimbrough, 1998, & Strapp & Farr, 2010).

### **Major-Related Organizations and Academic Achievement**

Strapp and Farr (2010) investigated the effect of involvement in major-related activities on the satisfaction of psychology major students with their program and their academic performance. The study was conducted at Western Oregon University (WOU) and 71 senior students majoring in psychology were surveyed four weeks before they graduated. There are seven extracurricular activities available to psychology major student at WOU. These are: 2 internships that consist of mentoring and practicum programs, research or teaching assistantships, membership in Psi Chi honor society and, Western Oregon University Psychology Student Association and Psychology Club. The honor society has admission requirements whereas the clubs do not have any. The study found that involvement in major-related activities provided student satisfaction and better academic performance; and of course different activities provided different types of satisfaction to students.

The students were satisfied with the quality of advising when they participated in internships, those who were club members reported better satisfaction with job market preparation and study preparation like Psi Chi members, who reported that faculty were accessible and the courses were available. In general, psychology major senior students who were involved in activities related to their major were satisfied and did well. Strapp and Farr (2010) suggest that faculty and administrators should encourage students to get involved in major related extracurricular activities. They also raised some questions for further research such as relationship between involvement in honor societies and preparation to the job market or graduate school; and long-term effect of satisfaction of alumni who were very active in college; do they give back to their former institution?

## CONCLUSION

In general involvement extracurricular activities is part of college experience and strengthens the ties between students and their institutions. Several studies have linked student engagement in extracurricular activities with positive academic performance while others suggest that low academic performance does not result from extracurricular activities. However not all types of organizations have a positive impact on academic achievement. Major-related activities have been reported to improve student performance. Studies on the impact of Greek letter organizations on academic achievement yield controversial views but report an increase in student self-esteem and development of leadership skills. Therefore academic affairs officials are encouraged to engage their students in different activities out of the classroom keeping in mind that not all extracurricular activities have equal benefits.

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