

A Study of the Effects of Student Involvement on Academic Achievement

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Student Involvement

Students at colleges and universities have been involved in student organizations for hundreds of years, beginning with the inception of secret societies and political groups. According to Guido-DiBrito and Bachelor (1988), “student organizations play an especially critical role in leadership development where students learn, are tested, succeed, and sometimes fail”. Similarly, a report conducted by the Study Group on Excellence in American Higher Education in 1984 identified student involvement as the key condition for improving undergraduate education with involvement in student organizations being the first step towards student involvement.

From the beginning of student involvement at colleges and universities, students have sought to increase their intellectual capacities, experience social activities, strengthen academic performance, and receive some of the developmental skills associated with a future career. These attributes and skills can be attained through involvement in an academic club, programming board, spiritual organization, athletic team, community service organization, and other various methods for utilizing skills and talents for extracurricular activity.

In 1985, Astin developed a theory of involvement that suggests that “students learn by becoming involved” (p.133). Similarly, Chickering and Gamson (1987) stressed the importance of involvement in *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. It states that educationally purposeful activities such as student-faculty contact, student cooperation, active

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learning, prompt feedback, task completion, high expectations, and utilization of diverse talents and ways of learning all contribute to learning and personal development.

There is a plethora of literature that studies the relationship between student involvement and academic achievement. However, results of these studies are not consistent and do not provide significant insight into the effects of student involvement on academic achievement. According to Gayles and Hu (2009, “engagement in educational activities has also been found to have a positive impact on learning and personal development for students in the general population” (p.329). In contrast to that study, Yin and Lei (2007) found a significant negative correlation between campus involvement and overall academic achievement. Chee, Pino, and Smith (2005) complicated findings even more by stating, “for women, active participation in student clubs or groups was positively associated with GPA. For men, employment was negatively related with GPA” (p.604).

Keeping these studies in mind, it is very important for more research to be conducted on the controversy surrounding student involvement’s effects on student grade point average. Therefore, researchers set out to find out if there was a significant correlation between student involvement and academic achievement. Researchers developed the following research question to guide their studies: “What is the difference in average grade point average for students involved in student organizations and students not involved in student organizations?” This would be determined by implementing mandatory student involvement in a club or organization for four years of undergraduate education at one institution and measuring results of academic achievement through graduating grade point average. Those results would be compared to a control group who would not receive the implementation of mandatory student involvement.

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Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Characteristics of College Freshmen

Boule, Michelle, 2009, Drawing First-Year Students, *Library Journal*

Brinkworth, Russell, McCann, Ben, Matthews, Carol, & Nordstrom, Karin, 2009, First Year Expectations and Experiences: Student and Teacher Perspectives, *Higher Education*

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Eklund-Leen, Susan J, & Young, Robert B., 1997, Attitudes of Student Organization Members and Nonmembers about Campus and Community Involvement, *Community College Review*.

Howell, Robert T., & Busby, Joe R., 2002, Student Organizations: How Important Are They to Technology Education?, *The Technology Teacher*

Coulter, Fred W., Goin, Robin P., & Gerard, Jean M., 2004, Assessing Graduate Students' Needs: The Role of Graduate Student Organizations, *Educational Research Quarterly*

McCannon, Melinda & Bennett, Phyllis, Choosing to Participate or Not: A Study of College Students' Involvement in Student Organizations, *College Student Journal*

Guido, DiBrito, F. & Batchelor, S.W., 1988, Developing Leadership Potential Through Student Activities and Organizations, *New Directions for Student Services*

Study Group on Excellence in American Higher Education, 1984, Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American

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Stupinsky, Robert, Renaud, Robert, Daniels, Lia, Haynes, Tara, & Perry, Raymond, The Interrelation of First-Year College Students' Critical Thinking Disposition, Perceived Academic Control, and Academic Achievement, *Research in Higher Education*

Sheard, Michael, 2009, Hardiness Commitment, Gender, and Age differentiate University Academic Performance, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*

Student Involvement and Academic Achievement (Empirical Studies)

House, Daniel J., 2000, The Effect of Student Involvement on the Development of Academic Self-Concept, *Journal of Social Psychology*

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Strauss, Linda C. & Volkwein, J. Fredericks, 2002, Comparing Student Performance and Growth in 2- and 4- Year Institutions, *Research in Higher Education*

Camp, William G., 2001, Participation in Student Activities and Achievement: A Covariance Structural Analysis, *Journal of Educational Research*

Chee, K., Pino, N., & Smith, W., 2005, Gender Differences in the Academic Ethic and Academic Achievement, *College Student Journal*

Ullah, Hafeez & Wilson, Mardell A., 2007, Students' Academic Success and Its Association to Student Involvement with Learning and Relationships with Faculty and Peers, *College Student Journal*

Yin, D., & Lei, S., 2007, Impacts of Campus Involvement on Hospitality Student Achievement and Satisfaction, *Education*

Athletes and Academic Achievement

Aries, Elizabeth, McCarthy, Danielle, Salovey, Peter, & Banaji, Mahzarin, 2004, A Comparison of Athletes and Non-Athletes at Highly Selective Colleges: Academic Performance and Personal Development, *Research in Higher Education*

Gayles, Joy Gaston & Hu, Shouping, 2009, The Influence of Student Engagement and Sport Participation on College Outcomes Among Division I Student Athletes, *Journal of Higher Education*

Spiritual/Religious Organizations and Academic Achievement

Schubmehl, J., Cubbellotti, S., & Ornum, W., 2009, The Effect of Spirituality and Campus Ministry on Academic Accomplishment in College Students, *Adolescence*

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Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Question: What is the difference in average grade point average between students actively involved in a student organization and students who are not actively involved in a student organization?

Hypothesis: Students actively involved in a student organization will have a higher average grade point average than those not actively involved in a student organization.

Operational Definitions

Student organization: A student organization is defined as a group comprised of students who share common interests, support the mission, goals, and values of the institution, and foster the overall development of each student member. Each organization must be registered with its respective Office of Student Activities, or similar office, in order to be considered a student organization. For the purpose of this study, researchers also included athletics and intramural sports under the umbrella of student organizations.

“Actively involved”: In order to be considered “actively involved” students were required to attend 85% of the organization’s meetings and events and show true investment to the cause. Members with poor attendance and lack of commitment were not considered “actively involved” in the club or organization.

Setting

This study was performed at two separate universities, the demographics of each listed below:

Hoosier State University

Geographic location: Bellevue, Nebraska

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-population: 130, 587

-Mid West region of the United States

-Suburban farming community

Student enrollment: 49, 359 undergraduate students (freshman class = 11,254)

Institutional type: State-funded, research-centered university

Admission requirements: 2.5 GPA and 21 ACT score

Average GPA of entering freshmen: 3.0

Average SAT/ACT score of entering freshmen: 20

Athletic Division: Division I

Number of student organizations: 600+

Student organization involvement: Student organization involvement is relatively low, with only 15% of students being involved with an organization. Organizations require members to have a 2.5 GPA for membership, with several others setting the minimum higher.

Professionals do not encourage student involvement and focus heavily on learning inside the classroom only. Many are not from student affairs background and do not see the need of student organizations. Most of the faculty members who do advise organizations only do so because it is required of their position. There is a large number of organizations, however, the majority of them have very low membership numbers and are on the verge of losing their club recognition with the University.

University of Topeka

Geographic location: Topeka, Kansas

-population: 122,647

-Mid West region of the United States

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-Suburban farming community

Student enrollment: 50,589 undergraduate students (freshman class = 12,899)

Institutional type: State-funded, research centered university

Admission requirements for freshmen: 2.5 GPA and 22 ACT score

Average GPA of entering freshmen: 3.2

Average ACT score of entering freshmen: 21

Athletic Division: Division I

Number of student organizations: 550+

Student organization involvement: Student organization involvement is relatively low, with only 15% of students being involved with an organization. Organizations require members to have a 2.5 GPA for membership, with several others setting the minimum higher.

Professionals do not encourage student involvement and focus heavily on learning inside the classroom only. Many are not from student affairs background and do not see the need of student organizations. Most of the faculty members who do advise organizations only do so because it is required of their position. There is a large number of organizations, however, the majority of them have very low membership numbers and are on the verge of losing their club recognition with the University.

Time Line

January 4th, 2014. Researchers began researching numerous universities to find two, very similar institutions in regards to enrollment numbers, location, admission requirements, and academic credentials. Research consisted of compiling demographics and constructing university profiles. Initially, researchers found twenty potential universities for the study, and then narrowed them down to five.

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January 30, 2014. Contacted our top five choice universities to determine their levels of interest and explore the possibility of meeting with their President, Provost, and/or Office of Student Activities Staff. Three of the five universities reciprocated the interest and meetings were made with these institutions to propose our study, which consisted of the following requirement:

Requirement: It is a University requirement that every student become actively involved in at least one, recognized student organization throughout his or her entire undergraduate career at the university. The student organizations have no minimum GPA requirement, as every student is required to obtain and retain membership. However, some organizations do implement a GPA requirement as set by their National Organization (i.e. Greek chapters).

February 15, 2014. Researchers met with University of Topeka, which expressed some interest in participating in the study. The University of Topeka expressed concern over logistics accompanied with the project, and preferred to serve as the control group.

February 20, 2014. Researchers met with Hoosier University. Their staff expressed great interest in participating in the study, with more specific interest in actually implementing the requirement for their incoming freshmen.

February 28, 2014. Researchers met with University of Bellevue, which expressed no interest in the project at all.

March 1, 2014. Researchers contacted the University of Topeka and Hoosier University to inform them of their selection for the study.

April 1 – June 30, 2014. Researchers began meeting with both universities on a weekly basis in order to work out logistics of the implementation. This preparation required reviewing and revising the student handbook at Hoosier University, and also informing all incoming

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freshmen of this new requirement. Staffing issues also arose, with memberships increasing, more organization advisors were needed and faculty members were required to step up and fulfill those responsibilities. The proposal was also presented to students who were currently in student organizations to receive feedback. Generally, students at Hoosier University were very pleased and welcomed the change. University of Topeka students were also very receptive and were very interested in implementing a similar program once the study was completed.

August 25, 2014. Class began at both universities.

August 27, 2014. Hoosier University held a student activities fair in order to display all of the clubs and organizations that the freshmen could become a member. Freshmen were told they had two weeks to select a club and become a member.

August 11, 2014. Deadline for freshmen to select organization.

August 12 – May 30, 2014. The school year for both universities. At Hoosier University, monthly evaluations were given to each freshman student via email, and were required to fill them out. These surveys asked about the student's involvement in the group, how they were doing academically, and asked about recognizable skills learned through the membership of the group that could be applied to their academics. Evaluations were also given to each club's advisor, president and executive board, which verified that every freshman student was legitimately actively involved in the group. These evaluations were given every month. If freshmen were not fulfilling the requirement, there were repercussions. On their first offense, they simply had to meet with the Director of Student Activities to discuss the violation. For the second offense, they were assessed a fee of \$75, and had two weeks to pay the fee to the University. On the third offense, the student was required to meet with the President and Provost to discuss possible academic suspension.

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Also, at Hoosier University, freshmen students were allowed to leave a group if they could provide adequate reasoning to the Director of Student Activities. However, the student had two weeks to find another group and become a member. Semester grades were examined in December to examine any differences.

At the University of Topeka, University operations proceeded normally, with the same level of involvement from the students and staff.

May 30, 2014 – May 30, 2019 – Academic records were kept up with every semester. Each semester GPA's were tabulated and recorded. The same procedures and policies were implemented at Hoosier University as stated before. Once graduation was achieved, all of the GPA's for both universities were calculated to determine the average GPA of the two classes. Those GPA's were then compared to the entering GPA's of the classes.

Sampling

A cluster random sample was used. Researchers implemented the requirement on the freshman class, which was representative of the entire university student body. By focusing on one grade level, the data was more easily obtained and measurable. Also, researchers focused on freshmen students as their study habits and time management skills are still in the immature phase of development, and can be more easily manipulated than students who are in their second, third, or fourth year of college. The freshmen class at Hoosier University served as the experimental group, as the membership requirement was enforced on them. The freshmen class at the University of Topeka served as the control group, as they were not required to become actively involved in an organization and were enrolled at a university where membership is not encouraged. The two universities selected were very similar in geographic location, size,

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institutional type, number of student organizations available, and had very similar admission requirements, freshmen ACT scores, and freshmen GPA's.

Target population: freshman students at Hoosier University (N = 11,254)

Control population: freshman students at University of Topeka (N = 12,899)

Accessible population: freshman students - access to all academic records (N = 11, 254)

Data Producing Sample: freshman students who were required to be actively involved in a student organization all four years of their undergraduate studies (N = 11,254)

Sample: freshman students entering the University in 2015 and graduating in 2019 (N = 9,324)

Research Design:

R1 01 X 02

R2 01 02

Where:

R1 is the experimental group

R2 is the control group

01 is the average GPA of the students when entering college

02 is the average GPA of the students when graduating college

X is the intervention (implementation of requirement)