Parent, Peer, and Faculty Influence on Student Co-curricular Involvement

Heather Ammons, M.Ed.
First Year Experience Coordinator
Darton College

Michelle Maher, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Higher Education Administration
University of South Carolina

Presented at the annual conference of the American College Personnel Association
Washington, DC, March, 2009
Abstract

Undergraduate science majors were interviewed to identify messages received from parents, peers, and professors about the value of co-curricular involvement and to determine the influence of these messages on subsequent student participation decisions. Study implications and recommendations can assist student affairs professionals who work with these undergraduate science students (who constitute a large part of the total undergraduate student population on most campuses) to strengthen their professional competency as advisors who support holistic student development.
Parent, Peer, and Faculty Influence on Student Co-curricular Involvement

Involvement in co-curricular activities is an integral part of the college experience (Kuh, 1995). As Hughes (1999) noted, the “other stuff,” as out-of-class activities are often called by many students, is important throughout a student’s academic career. These activities encourage students to develop skills that they might not learn in the classroom, such as leadership, public speaking, and management of resources. These skills will aid students as they further their career or life goals. Additionally, through participation in campus or community organizations, students can reach beyond the sometimes seemingly mundane aspects of academics to become more strongly tied to their campus or community (Hughes, 1999).

Although students as a whole are known to benefit from extracurricular involvement, little is known about how specific groups of students, such as those defined by discipline affiliation, are affected by extracurricular involvement. This research effort focuses on undergraduate science majors, defined here as any undergraduate student with a declared major in science as listed in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of South Carolina including chemistry, biology, math, physics, marine science, cardiovascular technology, geographical science or statistics, to explore who influences them to participate in extracurricular activities, as well as what messages they receive from parent, peers, and university personnel in regards to participation in extracurricular activities.

Relevant Literature

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Astin’s (1999) theory of involvement, and is informed by literature on how students’ decision to engage, in this case in co-curricular activities, are influenced by significant others, including parents, peers, and
professors. Astin’s (1999) theory of involvement posits that involvement is the “amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). Astin suggests that involvement is core to the behavior of the student, rather than to the student’s feeling or thoughts (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). He emphasizes that a student’s ability to achieve a certain goal is a function of the time and effort devoted to specific activities that assist in gaining that goal, such as a student studying to better understand a concept in a class or to further their career options by participating in a certain activity. As Astin defines involvement, it is not only participation in academics, but also participation in co-curricular activities and interaction with staff and faculty that can aid in student development.

Co-curricular activities can be defined as on-campus activities with which a student is involved on a regular basis and/or that require a time commitment (Woo & Bilynsky, 1994). This definition corresponds with Astin’s idea that involvement requires the student to put time into an activity or a goal. For most students, involvement is directed to a club, organization, intramural team, athletic team, or student office toward which they feel a certain regard. They may have an interest in its ideals or maintain a sense that their involvement could help in eventual careers (Holzweiss, et al., 2007).

Parents

Parents are one group who, for most students, have been a constant in their lives and have had the opportunity to influence several decisions, such as major and career choices (Fisher & Padmawidjaja, 1999). Fisher and Padmawidjaja (1999) found that parents are influential in several domains. Encouragement, educational expectations, critical life events, vicarious learning, and work identity in regards to career choice are specific areas that parents often encourage their children to achieve levels above the parent. Educational expectations, in
Influence on Co-curricular Involvement

particular, focuses on the parents’ “high educational expectations and stressed the relationship between one’s educational level and obtainable social and professional goals” (Fisher & Padmawidjaja, 1999, p. 6). This influence has been shown to encourage students to achieve a status above their parents because the parents have been a continuous support for the student.

Additionally, Rice (1995) found that a student’s attachment to their caregivers could influence other lifetime relationships, as well as adjustment to college life. Specifically, stable and secure attachment can have a positive influence on a student’s adjustment to college. However, Rice did indicate that as a student progresses from a freshman to an upperclassman, the student reports that parents and peers are just as accessible and needed. This means that, at all points of a college career, parents have the ability to continuously influence. The attachment between parent and child may in “the presence of secure attachment relations prior to, or coincident with, the challenge of committing to a major, and future implications that such a commitment entails, may facilitate the student’s sense of purpose, direction, and involvement in educational goals” (Rice & others, 1995, p. 15). It is possible that a parent’s influence in career choices and the attachment a student may have to their parents will extend to influencing that student’s choices in extracurricular activities or their reasons for participating.

Peers

Winston and Zimmerman (2003) define a peer as an “equal” (p.1). To them, peers influence each other by “peer effects,” which “exist when a person’s behavior is affected by his or her interaction with one or more other people” (p.4). For college students, the term ‘peers’ can indicate any number of people they encounter throughout their college career. Regardless of whom they define as a peer, peer effects are present and influence students’ performance across a range of domains (Winston & Zimmerman, 2003). For example, peer interaction influences
students’ career and major choice, political associations, and openness to diversity (Kuh, 1993, 1995; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, et al., 1999). Whitt and colleagues (1999) found that “the more students were involved with peers in both course-related and non-course-related interactions, the greater their cognitive growth during college” (p.72). Along those same lines, Moran and Gonyea (2003) note, “students spend the greatest amount of time in college with other students; therefore, they are the primary agents of socialization for one another in a variety of domains” (p. 13). Thus, students’ involvement in co-curricular activities likely influences their development to a greater extent when these activities involve their peers.

University Personnel

Throughout their college career, students interact with various university personnel. The interactions most often studied are between faculty and students, as these interactions are believed to influence students’ satisfaction with and persistence in college, as well as the development of interpersonal skills, self and career identify, and personal values (Pascarella, 1980).

Although many researchers find these interactions important, Cotton and Wilson (2006) found that many students are not aware of the benefits of interactions with faculty, or realize that faculty are available to help with more than homework. This finding correlates with Jaasma and Koper’s (2001) finding that students are most likely to approach their professor about issues of an academic nature. However, social interactions between faculty and students are found to be important as they give students a connection to the professor and, in many cases, students begin to desire to “please their instructor and to avoid disapproval” (Cotton & Wilson, 2006, p. 511). It is possible that some students do value these social interactions and begin to develop a mentoring relationship with the faculty. Through this, professors can become “change agents,” as
Hughes (1999) refers to them (p. 23). These change agents likely send messages about the value of co-curricular participation to the students with whom they interact.

This research effort uses Astin’s (1999) theory of involvement and relevant literature about significant others to explore who influences students to participate in extracurricular activities, as well as what messages students receive from parent, peers, and university personnel in regards to participation in extracurricular activities.

Method

Site

The large southeastern university was chosen as the research site due to the extensive range of science majors offered, the sizable number of students enrolled within the College of Arts and Sciences, and the numerous opportunities for co-curricular involvement. With more than 300 organizations in operation, students can participate in Greek, honor, interest, international, media, military, political, professional, religious, residence hall government, service, or sport organizations. Therefore, opportunities for student co-curricular engagement are plentiful, and almost any undergraduate science major who decides to participate could find co-curricular activities to match personal interests.

Sample

The study focused exclusively on full-time undergraduate science majors defined here as any undergraduate student with a declared major in science as listed in the College of Arts and Sciences including chemistry, biology, math, physics, marine science, cardiovascular technology, geographical science or statistics. Study participants were limited to undergraduate science majors because these students have selected majors with stringent academic performance standards, and as a result may be least likely to feel they have the time to participate in co-
Influence on Co-curricular Involvement

Curricular activities, regardless of these activities proven benefits. Additionally, professional success in these fields is becoming more dependent on one’s ability to communicate effectively with those both inside and outside the field – the very skill set that co-curricular participation is most likely to foster. Finally, very little, if any, extant research is available to explain science majors’ choices to engage in co-curricular activities, and this is to the detriment of student affairs professionals who assist this student population. The study at hand seeks to ameliorate this situation.

Undergraduate science majors were recruited to the study through flyers posted in main academic halls, announcements sent to undergraduate directors, and e-mails sent to coordinators of co-curricular organizations. In all, twelve students who described themselves as “involved in co-curricular activities” were recruited for participation in this study. Data on these students’ age, student classification, declared major, as well as data on the type of co-curricular activities and the extent of each student’s involvement in these activities are presented in the results section of this paper.

Data Collection and Analysis

After reviewing a study description, completing IRB consent forms, and completing a brief demographic information sheet, each participant responded to an in-depth, semi-structured interview conducted during the 2007 academic year. Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 60 minutes; all interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The interview protocol was designed to gather data on students’ perceptions of their experiences within their chosen major, perceptions of their involvement in co-curricular activities, including any associated benefits and drawbacks, and data on messages about this involvement they felt they had received from parents, peers, and professors. The protocol is presented in Appendix A. Interview responses
were coded for descriptive, pattern, and interpretive emergent themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and rich patterns of messages about co-curricular involvement from parents, peers and faculty and subsequent student participation decisions were identified.

Results

Although 12 students who identified themselves as undergraduate science majors involved in co-curricular agreed to participate, during the interviews it was discovered that one student was actually a graduate student. Due to the small sample size, this student’s data were retained for analysis. Table 1 presents information on student participants across a range of relevant categories. All names used are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

*Table 1: Participant Descriptors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Activities involved (yr.)</th>
<th>Hours involved (wk.)</th>
<th>Extracurricular Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Mathematics, emphasis on Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Cheerleading, Teaching Fellows, Relay for Life, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, MyCarolina Student Advisory Board, Bog Brothers Big Sisters, Shandon Baptist College Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libby</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td>Marine Science</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>10 or more</td>
<td>Marine Science, Graduate Students, Students Engaged in Aquatic Science, St. Laurence Place, Science Quest, Golden Key, Sigma Alpha Lambda, Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Mu Epsilon, French Club, Hillel, Marching Band, Dixon Fellows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>Daily Gamecock, Bisexual Gay Lesbian Straight Alliance, Society of Physics Students, Regency Hospice, Student Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Marine Science</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Undergraduate research, Students Engaged in Aquatic Science, Carolina Cycle Club, Habitat for Humanity, Capstone Mentoring, SCUBA Club, National Residence Hall Honorary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5th year; non-traditional</td>
<td>Physics, Statistics</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Phi Mu Epsilon, Math Club, Statistics Club, SMR, Society of Physics Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsay</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Sophomore; non-traditional</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Gamecock Math Club, PAGE five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Marine Science</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Students Engaged in Aquatic Science, Mark representative, undergraduate research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5th Year</td>
<td>Geology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Geology Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Marine Science, Biology</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>Students Engaged in Aquatic Science, MarSci, University &amp; Presidential Ambassadors, undergraduate research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>u101 Peer Leader, sorority, National Society of Collegiate Scholars, Resident Advisor, American Chemical Society, honor fraternity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Chemistry, Psychology</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Intramurals, Quiz Bowl, Waverly school program, Maxcy Hall Government, Honors Council, Maxcy Ambassadors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview data provided a wealth of information regarding what influences these students to become involved in extracurricular activities, as well as what messages these students receive about participation.

Parents

A majority of students’ parents exerted a significant and positive influence on students’ extracurricular involvement. For example, Libby had very supportive parents who urged her, “to push yourself, but don’t overdo it. You know, find your own [way]. What you can handle and what you enjoy.” Libby noted that she did not feel pushed into one specific area or academic focus, but that her parents wanted her to try out various groups, such as arts or science clubs. That information led to her participation in a wide variety of groups.

William felt that his parents supported him in his decisions to become involved, “as long as I take care of myself and the job I have to do being a student, they’re fine with it. I mean, they’re glad that I get out and get involved and want to meet new people and want to be like a contributing member to society and stuff.” Sherry also felt that she had the support of her parents, particularly with her involvement in University Ambassadors and undergraduate research. She said:

They think it’s really great. I know my parents really love the fact that I’m a University Ambassador. They always threaten to join in one of my tours when they come down
here…But they think it’s really cool and really like that I am involved with undergraduate research even though they have no clue what I am doing most of the time.

In addition to giving support, some students’ parents were involved in their own extracurricular activities and served as an example and role model for involvement. For example, Michael’s father was involved with the local volunteer fire department and often helped elderly neighbors by donating food grown in his garden. For Michael, his father’s example is “where I get my sense of helping others from.” Michael’s motivations for being involved with various extracurricular activities came from his need to help others and the example his father had shown him. Lauren also recalled an example of her parents’ involvement. Her father was involved in “other things besides his job,” and from his own involvement felt that extracurricular activities “were a good thing” in which to be involved. While he did not directly support the activities she was involved with, her father’s support for Lauren’s involvement stemmed from his own involvement and the benefit of participation.

Beyond supporting the students and being involved themselves, parents also had the potential to be associated with negative influences on the students’ extracurricular involvement. Academics in particular were often the focus of some parents’ hesitations with involvement, according to the undergraduate science majors. Alice’s parents supported her participation in extracurricular activities, but wanted to make sure that academics are first:

[They] think it’s great as long as I get my academics done first. So when I call home and I’m like ‘you know, mom, I didn’t do so well on this test.’ She’s like ‘well, you are doing too much you need to stop doing something. You know, don’t things get out of hand. Make sure you keep academics first.’ But other than that, they feel it’s a good thing.
Sherry, Michael, and Jacob all heard similar comments from their parents about how extracurricular involvement would impact their academics. Jacob’s parents, focused on Jacob completing his academics, since he was a non-traditional student at the age of twenty-seven. Jacob felt his parent’s opinion on his extracurricular activities and their relation was, “I don’t think my parents really care about what I do for extracurricular. They just sort of want me to finish school…as long as [it] doesn’t interfere with me finishing school, [they] don’t care.”

In addition to academics, parents also commented on the time commitment and the negative impacts extracurricular activities might have on their students. Libby’s parents were initially concerned about her commitment to band in high school and did not want her to participate as, “they thought it would be too time consuming.” However, she did participate in band, her “teenage rebellion” as she calls it - but when she enrolled at the University of South Carolina, she dropped band due to the time commitment. Sarah’s parents, as she recalls, would voice their concern for the time commitment and the impact her choice in involvement were having on her career decisions. Sarah’s decision to join a sorority was not fully supported by her parents, her mother in particular, “told me that that wasn’t going to help me in physics…but yeah, my mom really helped me make up my mind about getting out of that sorority. That was her biggest influence, I think.”

Lindsay, as a non-traditional student and mother of two, had a different influence and information exchange. While her parents may not have been a factor or influenced her decisions to get involved, her children were. While her children were “very supportive” of her extracurricular involvement, they did have some concerns that caused her to delay her decision to participate in intramural soccer.
Right now, it’s just time conflicts more than anything. My son was little nervous about me joining soccer cause he’s like ‘mommy, these are college level and they’re rough and tough and you might get hurt.’ I was like ‘well if I think I’m going to get hurt I’ll stop’...So he’s a little concerned but for the most [part], they have been supportive.

Peers

For many of the undergraduate students, peers provided information on how to get involved in activities and what extracurricular activities to pursue. As Libby said, “When you first like get into college, it seems like most people push extracurriculars on you just, just to fluff your resume.” Katie also found that peers often recommended joining extracurricular activities to network, find future jobs or other opportunities.

Everybody recommend joining groups so, that’s probably one major reason [I joined] and one of the reasons they recommend it is for networking, but you find out about stuff on campus that you might be interested in.

However, Alice found that more senior students who she knew at the University were encouraging her to get involved in activities to meet other students and to make new friends besides them, “they motivated me to get involved in something.”

Stemming from the information they received from their peers, these students reported that they were often asked to join activities by their friends. Libby mentioned that she joined the American Marketing Association and the honors fraternity, Phi Sigma Pi with friends. In particular, she joined the American Marketing Association because her friend did not want to attend the meeting alone. Sarah joined the Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Alliance because of a friend, as well. In reflecting upon her friends’ influence on her activities, Sarah said,
I’ve applied to stuff with them and whatever, but other than that, it’s not like...It’s never been the case that a friend of mine was in a, well, my best friend was in BGLSA and always told me about it. And I was like, sure I’ll go represent the S [in BGLSA].

Michael and Lauren also reported that their peers had encouraged them to participate in the same activities as the peers. Lindsay, whose friend was involved with an African American medical club, while not influenced to join that particular club, did feel that African American activities as a whole were worth looking into:

Well normally, I wouldn’t join anything African American or I can’t even explain why, but I’ve been looking at it. Because, just think about the fact that how much she has all of her friends….and she’s sort of made this community.

Sarah was driven by the type of people with whom she wanted to surround herself, and concept not mentioned by any of the other students, especially with those she interacted with during her involvement with Student Government:

It’s really good to be around those people because they’re driven leaders; they’re not the kind of kids that are going to fail out of college. You know, you don’t have like people on the executive cabinet of Student Government and then have them flake out. And it’s good to surround yourself with that permanently and that’s the kind of people you want to be around to at least be level with them or I don’t know that needs to be your norm. You don’t need to sink below and do what maybe the average college student is doing because that is probably too low you know for me. It’s a good group of people, a good demographic to be around like just successful people.
University Personnel

All students mentioned talking to their professors, both in and outside their major, about academic issues. The majority of the academic issues discussed were grades and other classroom issues. Alice specifically mentioned, “career options, just the purpose of the class” as the center of some of her academic-based conversations with professors. Additionally, the majority of the students reported having casual conversations with professors. Casual conversations started most often with a simple “Hey” in the hallway or a stop by the professor’s office. As Jennifer put it, the conversations flowed in the following manner, “Just what’s going on with my life. Nothing really specific. Hey how you doing? What’s going on?”

However, if involvement in extracurricular activities information was ever mentioned, it was usually received via e-mail or delivered to a classroom as a whole. Sarah’s physics professor sent e-mails to all of the physics majors: “He shoots e-mails to every physics students because, hey there’s only 40, and he’s just always letting us know when anything even slightly physics-related is going on.” Michael also found that his professor would mention clubs or activities in which to participate at the beginning of the year. His music appreciation professor, for instance, mentioned joining the choir to the whole class, “It was at the beginning of the year. Yeah, you know, what we have here in the music college, college of music, you can do this, this, and this.”

Many students reflected that the activities the professors mentioned often corresponded with the professor’s areas of interest. Jacob’s physics and statistics professors would mention activities specifically related to those areas, such as Midway Physics Day, where high school students attend the state fair and do simple physics-related experiments with the aid of
Influence on Co-curricular Involvement

undergraduate physics majors, or SPS, the Society of Physics Students. Libby also faced similar situations with her marine science classes:

In the marine science, in the introductory classes they would mention joining SEAS, but that was about it. It wasn’t really pushed otherwise besides like working or getting into a lab to work. There were really no clubs mentioned.

Additionally, Alice reflected that her chemistry professor was one of the few professors who mentioned extracurricular activities in the classroom setting. Her professors, “used to mention the meetings for ACS [American Chemical Society] all the time, but other than that I think I’ve had like a math professor say something about a math club my freshmen year and stuff.”

However, her professor’s mention of the ACS meetings did encourage her to attend. “Sometimes I didn’t know when the meetings were so when they mentioned it in class I was like, ‘Oh I didn’t know it was then,’ so I usually ended up going.”

Several students found their professor to be supportive of their extracurricular endeavors through the information they shared with the students. Sherry felt that her decision to participate in activities beyond SEAS and the marine science committee was, for the most part, supported by her professors. “They think it’s really funny that I’m a university ambassador. Well, I mean they think it’s good, but it’s kind of random.” One of Sarah’s physics professors handpicked her for participation in a special trip to the Fermi Lab for a physics roadmap, but she also felt that the same professor, “always [gave] me the opportunity” and encouraged her to pursue her other interests in art. Katie summed up the support she received from her professors by saying:

Mostly the overall idea about extracurriculars…is good. They usually say in most situations it’s good to be involved and meet people and they like that. And I think it’s a good part of mental well-being and that’s what professors think.
Although the students reported professors mentioning or encouraging them to participate in extracurricular activities, a few of the students did express their disappointment of how professors often presented activities; a brief mention early in the year was not enough. During University 101, the general first-year seminar course at the University, Jane felt that extracurricular activities should have been mentioned and encouraged by the professor more than they were. “In University 101 [they were mentioned] a little bit. Not as much as I think they should have though. They did not put a big emphasis on that…. ” Michael also mentioned that some of the professors have the attitude of “if you want it, here it is,” and some of the professors do not bother to encourage any students to participate in activities.

Additionally, some students were also unhappy with how some professors expressed their opinions and concerns in regards to extracurricular activities. Jane recalled a meeting with a chemistry professor concerning participating in undergraduate research. The chemistry professor essentially brushed her off. This professor explained her research, told Jane her lab was full, but did not offer any alternatives. To Jane this was not a “very productive talk. Like it just felt like a dead end…She wasn’t very helpful.” As a result, Jane chose not to participate in undergraduate research. Katie also encountered negative feedback on extracurricular activities through the very same professors that often encouraged participation. “As soon as your grades go down or you get a bad grade, that’s the first thing they think it is.”

Discussion

The students provided examples of how their parents, peers, and faculty gave them information about involvement and about the different factors (e.g., time commitment) that influenced their decisions to participate. They reported the influences parents had on undergraduate science majors stemmed from the information they passed onto these students,
Influence on Co-curricular Involvement

parents own previous extracurricular involvement, as well as the support the parents’ gave to the students. Peers provided undergraduate science majors with information on how to become involved and were influential by asking them to join organizations, and providing the opportunity to surround themselves with students of a presumably higher caliber. Professors were described as providing information on various extracurricular activities, as well as encouragement to participate. However, some students mentioned frustrations when holding conversations with professors about how to get involved in extracurricular activities.

A careful analysis of interview data supports a revised framework, built upon Astin’s (1999) theory and presented in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Co-curricular Involvement Framework. Shows further relationships between motivation, influence and perceived value, as well as an added factor of information.](image)

This framework adds a unifying factor to all study data and suggests that that involvement in extracurricular activities is not an idea that ‘just happens.’ Several factors influence which co-curricular activities students opt to engage in, the extent to which they are
involved, and what they gain from their participation; as such, it is important to conceptualize and display these interconnections, and the framework serves this purpose.

Many aspects of the research results are inter-connected. For instance, motivation and influence impact each other as well as the perceived value for the students. As students are motivated to participate to gain friends or possibly a certain skill, they will of course perceive that they did gain that skill. The motivation to participate in that activity can also come from the information and influence a peer, professor, or parent has on the student. Additionally, the information that students received from their peers, professors, and parents impacted the type of influence these support systems had on the students themselves. Influence and motivation also have an impact on perceived value; however, information only impacted the influence a person has on the students involvement in extracurricular activities.

*What is Different About Science Majors?*

Science majors appear to be different from other undergraduate majors due to the academic rigor of their course work, pressures of success, as well as various other factors. This alone does not make them different; there is a possibility that science majors participate in extracurricular activities for different reasons. Science majors have also formed their own opinions of themselves and why they get involved. Jane felt that, “I don’t know if this is what really happens, but in my opinion I don’t think that they science majors really do much….I feel like if they do anything it’s undergraduate research or volunteer at a hospital or treatment. I feel like most of it is resume-geared.” While the researchers believe that students’ primarily academic and future job-related motivations for participation and the significant influence of professors may be specific on some levels to undergraduate science majors, there is no way to support this hypothesis without further research. The close contact these students have with
professors through undergraduate research and classroom time, pose as a great ground for professors to provide information on extracurricular activities.

Recommendations

Students will continue to be involved in extracurricular activities on university campuses and in their surrounding communities. Based on the analysis of the student interviews, the following recommendations are offered. Some are specific to science majors, while others are applicable to all students. These recommendations may be particularly helpful to peers, parents, professors, and their institutions.

Peers

1. Exchange information about activities outside of academic-related organizations in which other students may be interested. As illustrated from the findings of this study, longstanding friendships or future colleagues could develop out of these connections, as well as pique new interests.
2. Support your fellow students’ decisions to participate in a variety of activities, and then participate yourself.
3. Realize that your peers, while involved in the same activity as you, may have different motivations for participation. Help them discover their individual motivators and encourage them to reach that goal.

Parents

1. Support your student’s decision to participate in extracurricular activities through support and advice.
2. Serve as an example to your student through your own involvement, particularly if you feel that extracurricular activities are an important aspect of life.
3. The conversations they have with you about the time they devote to activities are particularly important since science majors often have a more rigorous academic schedule, encourage your student to make wise decisions about the activities in which they participate and the time they devote to them prior to university attendance and throughout their academic career.

Professors

1. Take responsibility for your strong influence by supporting students to participate in activities related to both academic and non-academic endeavors.

2. Encourage students to become active on campus by mentioning, either face-to-face, via e-mail, or to a whole classroom, the various activities occurring on campus or organizations in which you have a personal interest.

Institutions

1. Continue to provide students with activities outside the classroom that will encourage interaction with fellow students.

2. Create an institutional environment that values both academic pursuits and extracurricular pursuits so that students feel comfortable devoting time to both.

Conclusion

Peers, parents, and faculty significantly influence a student’s decision to become involved in extracurricular activities. Parents and professors are in the position, as bearers of knowledge, to provide information about extracurricular involvement, especially the benefits of involvement and by supporting a student’s decision to become involved. Peers, while having limited influence with their friends, serve mainly as information bearers. They provide information on how to get involved in activities and which activities are worthwhile
Student involvement in extracurricular activities is not a new phenomenon on college campuses, but students still need the support of the university structure as they participate in both activities and academics. Students stand to gain leadership skills, interpersonal skills, friends, and career goals through their involvement, and should be encouraged to participate in the activities that meet these expectations.
APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Protocol Revised 9/22/07

Thank you for talking with me today. I appreciate that you took time out of your day for this.

My thesis explores undergraduate science students’ extracurricular participation. Just so that we are clear on what extracurricular activities are, let me explain my definition. To me extracurricular activities are those activities that students participate in out of the classroom. These activities can include academic organizations, non-academic organizations as well as community service. So anything from a Biology Club to a theater group or to a Greek organization is covered in that area. Is that clear?

I would first like to discuss your motivations and what you’re getting out of your involvement. I understand that you are a [major].

1. Why did you choose this major?
2. Could you describe any positive experiences with your intended major?
3. Could you describe any negative experiences with this major?

I noticed that you are involved in [A], [B], and [C]. (From demographic sheet)

4. Why do you participate in these activities?
5. I noticed that you did/did not participate in any major-related activities. Why did/didn’t you chose to participate in the(se) major-related activities?
6. What have you gained from being involved?
7. Have you ever had a bad experience with one of these extracurricular activities? If so, can you describe what happened?
8. What have you enjoyed about these activities?
9. Has your involvement helped you in relation to your major?
10. How do you feel that being involved in extracurricular activities will help you in the future?
Let’s move on to people in your life that might have had some influence on decisions you have made such as peers, parents or professors.

11. How often do you talk with your professors, advisor, etc outside of the classroom setting?

12. If you do talk with them outside of the classroom, what do you talk about?

13. Has a professor ever mentioned extracurricular activities to you or a classroom as a whole? If so, what did this professor have to say?

14. Has a professor ever encouraged you to participate in any extracurricular activities? If so, what did they have to say?

15. What do your parents say about extracurricular involvement?

16. Do you feel the same way that your parents do? Why or why not?

17. Are your friends or classmates involved?

18. Has this influenced you to be involved? If so, in what way?

Thank you, again, for meeting with me. If I have any other questions, can I contact you via the e-mail address or cell phone number that you left on the sheet?
References


Woo, T.O. & Bilynsky, J.  (1994). Involvement in Extracurricular Activities and Adjustment to