



Extracurricular activities: Why do students participate and what do students gain?



Molly E. Randall, Rebecca W. Podell, Wyneiceia D. Hyman, Meredith L. Borner, and Professor Samuel Putnam

Abstract

This study investigated the development of college students' level of intellectual engagement, levels of involvement in extracurricular activities, and motivation for participation in extracurricular activities. Few studies have investigated how students' level of and reason for participation in extracurricular activities influence these changes in intellectual engagement. To examine these relations, a questionnaire was administered to eight hundred and twenty six students at Bowdoin College. Specifically, students' involvement in extracurricular activities, motivations for participation, and levels of intellectual engagement were measured. Students' intellectual engagement increased over time. Type of activity moderated the relationship between involvement and intellectual engagement, such that athletes had high levels of involvement and low levels of intellectual engagement, while political participants had low levels of involvement and high levels of intellectual engagement. Additionally, students' motivations for participation changed from first-year to senior year.

Introduction

Extracurricular activities and their developmental effects have become a recent area of interest in adolescent psychology. As these activities are increasingly understood as having a potentially significant impact on the intellectual, social, and psychological well being of young adults, researchers have sought to evaluate more specifically the ways in which such activities may act as positive influences on students. Additionally, researchers have examined the development of intellectual engagement in undergraduate students (Perry, 1970).

We are interested in examining the relationship between intellectual engagement and extracurricular activities, as well as students' motivations for joining such activities. While researchers have established a relationship between activity type and outcome (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001), the present study aims to examine the ways in which extracurricular activities affect intellectual engagement. We additionally seek to expand existing research by exploring students' developmental changes in motivation for involvement in extracurricular activities.

Methods

Participants

-826 participants (33% Males, 53% Females, 14% Did not report)

- Approximately 50% of student body participated

Question 1: Does Intellectual Engagement Change Over Time?

Background:

- Undergraduate students progress in intellectualism from simple, contingent thinking, to complex, relativistic thinking (Perry, 1970).

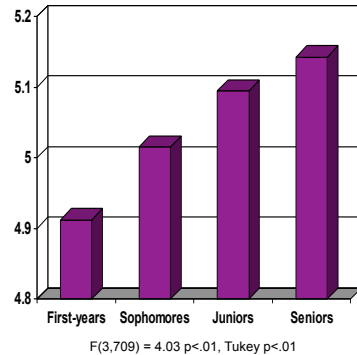
Hypothesis:

- Intellectual engagement will increase over time.

Results:

- Seniors were significantly more intellectually engaged than First-years.

Mean Intellectual Engagement by Class Year



Constructs

Intellectual Engagement (12 items): developing an increased interest in knowledge outside of the classroom

Involvement (10 items): dedication to participation outside of the classroom

Activity Types: Academic, Athletic, Artistic, Political, Common Good

Social Motivation (8 items): participation in activities outside of the classroom to make friendships and expand social groups

Vocational Motivation (10 items): participation in activities outside of the classroom to enhance prospective career options

Community Motivation (10 items): participation in activities to help others within and outside the Bowdoin community

Question 2: What Is the Relationship Between Involvement, Activity Type, and Intellectual Engagement?

Background:

- Undergraduate students involved in course-related extracurricular activities had low levels of intellectual growth (Bradley & Graham, 2000).

- Highly intellectually engaged undergraduate students were more involved in extracurricular activities (Marra & Palmer, 2004).

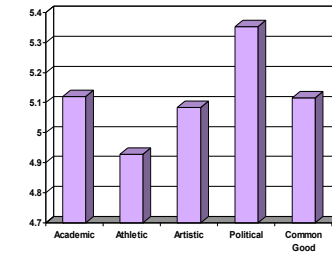
Hypotheses:

- For athletes, involvement will not predict intellectual engagement.
- For academic and political participants will have the highest levels of intellectual engagement.

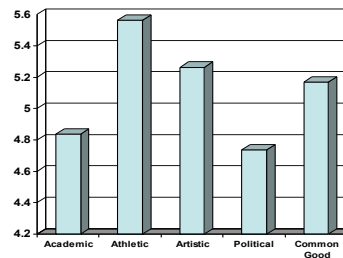
Results:

- Athletes were the most involved.
- Political participants were significantly more intellectually engaged than athletes.

Mean Intellectual Engagement by Activity Type



Mean Involvement by Activity Type



Question 3: Does Motivation for Involvement Change Over Time?

Background:

- Undergraduate students are concerned about their future careers at the start of their studies, and continue to spend more time thinking about their careers as the end of their studies approaches (Lairio & Penttinen, 2006).

- First-year student's sense of belonging increased with the development of more positive friendships, suggesting that socially motivated students seek new social contexts. (Pittman & Richmond, 2008).

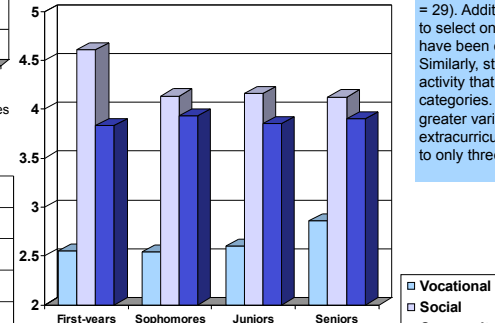
Hypotheses:

- Social motivation to participate in extracurricular activities will decrease over time.
- Vocational motivation to participate in extracurricular activities will increase over time.

Results:

- First-years were the most socially motivated.
- Seniors were marginally more vocationally motivated than First-years and Sophomores.

Mean Types of Motivation by Class Year



$F(3,689) = 9.60 p < .001$, Tukey $p < .05$
First-years sig. more socially motivated than all

$F(3,684) = 2.70 p < .05$, Tukey $p < .1$
Seniors marginally more vocationally motivated than First-years and Sophomores

Discussion

Consistent with Perry (1970), our findings demonstrate that undergraduate students experience increased intellectual engagement over their academic career. Thus, our initial hypothesis was supported by the current study. Activity type had a significant impact on involvement and intellectual engagement. As hypothesized, athletes' high level of involvement did not predict high intellectual engagement. Political participants were significantly more intellectually engaged than athletes. Interestingly, there was no effect of academic activity type on level of intellectual engagement. Recent research (Lairio & Penttinen, 2006) has shown an increase in vocational concern amongst undergraduate seniors. Our study found seniors to have the highest levels of vocational motivation. Additionally, our data coincides with past research (Pittman & Richmond, 2008) supporting the importance of social interactions amongst first year students.

The implications of these data suggest that undergraduates' activity type affects level of involvement and intellectual engagement in distinct ways. Developmentally, students' motivation for participation in extracurricular activities changes over time; initially, students cite social reasons for joining extracurricular activities, but throughout the course of their academic careers they become more vocationally motivated.

One limitation of our study was the disproportionate representation of students in each activity type (i.e. # of athletes = 316; political = 29). Additionally, the study required participants to select one primary activity although they may have been equally involved in other activities. Similarly, students may have been involved in an activity that did not fall into one of the five defined categories. Future research should examine a greater variety of types of motivation for joining extracurricular activities, as our study was limited to only three types.

References

- Barber, B., Eccles, J., & Stone, M. (2001). Whatever happened to the jock, the brain, and the princess? Young adult pathways linked to adolescent activity involvement and social identity. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 16*(5), 429-455.
- Bradley, J.S. & Graham, S.W. (2000). The effect of educational ethics and campus involvement on self-reported college outcomes. *Journal of College Student Development, 41*(5), 488-502.
- Lairio, M., & Penttinen, L. (2006). Students' career concerns: Challenges facing guidance providers in higher education. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 6*(3), 143-157.
- Marra, R. & Palmer, B. (2004). Encouraging intellectual growth: Senior college student profiles. *Journal of Adult Development, 11*(2), 111-122.
- Perry, W.G. (1970). Intellectual and ethical development in the college years. A scheme. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Pittman, L.D. & Richmond, A. (2008). University belonging, friendship quality, and psychological adjustment during the transition to college. *Journal of Experimental Education, 76*(4), 343-361.