

## **Extracurricular Activities: Why Do Students Participate and What Do Students Gain?**

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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. Past research has focused on students' intellectual growth over their college career (Perry, 1970), indicating that, over the course of their college career, undergraduate students progress from simple, contingent thinking, to complex, relativistic thinking. Few studies, however, have investigated how students' level of participation 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.

This study addressed three issues. First, does intellectual engagement in undergraduates change over time? Intellectual engagement was defined as indication of obtaining and considering knowledge outside of the classroom. It was predicted that students who were further into their college career would be more intellectually engaged. As hypothesized, students' intellectual engagement increased each year, with a significant difference between first-year students and senior students.

Secondly, the study explored the relationship between involvement, activity type and intellectual engagement. Past studies have shown that undergraduate students who rated high in intellectual engagement valued involvement in extracurricular activities (Marra & Palmer, 2004). It was predicted that the most involved students would have the highest levels of intellectual engagement. Additionally, students who participated in academic related extracurricular activities would have higher levels of intellectual engagement than those who did not. The results showed activity type as primary determinant of involvement and intellectual engagement, as athletes reported the highest level of extracurricular involvement, but the least intellectual engagement. Conversely, students in political extracurricular activities were the least involved but the most intellectually engaged.

Lastly, the study investigated change in students' motivation for involvement in extracurricular activities during their undergraduate years. Previous research has shown that 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 time in college approaches (Lairo & Penttinen, 2006). Thus, it was hypothesized that seniors would be the most vocationally motivated to join extracurricular activities. Additionally, it was hypothesized that on arriving to school, first-years would be the most socially motivated to join extracurricular activities. Results show that seniors were marginally more vocationally motivated than first-years and sophomores, while first-years were more socially motivated than all other classes.

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. Further research should examine a greater variety of motivations for joining extracurricular activities, as our study was limited to three types of motivation.