



Sustainable Development of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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Sub-theme 3

Quality Assurance on University Governance and Management

Students' involvement levels in art, music, theatre, sports and organizations at a Pacific Islands' university

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Abstract

Utilizing the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), 332 students of a university in the Pacific Islands responded. Employing the theory of student involvement, it aimed to investigate the student experiences, involvement and usage of campus facilities, involvement in clubs and organizations, art, music and theatre. The study found that students are least likely to play a team sport or individual sport at the university intramural, university club, or inter-university and consequently, least likely to follow a regular schedule of exercise and recreation. Students were also least likely to participate in art, music and theatre activities and be in committees and leadership roles regarding these clubs and organizations. These have implications for higher education providers in recognizing extracurricular activities in contributing toward intended graduate attributes and employability. Findings also indicate the onus is on higher education institutions to provide maximal learning both in and off campus, and in and out-of-classrooms, by deploying resources effectively into extracurricular experiences as well as the formal curriculum.

Key Words: Student Involvement, Student Experiences, student outcomes

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Introduction

Encouraging and promoting out-of-school student involvement is the “cornerstone of student affairs practice” (Flowers, 2004, p. 633), not simply in-class student engagement. Flowers (2004) also found that student involvement experiences had direct developmental gains in understanding art and humanities, personal and social development. The benefits of involvement in extracurricular activities range from lowering attrition rates and increased persistence, building leadership skills and successful adjustment to university. There is the importance of structured extracurricular activities at universities in sports, music, arts, hobbies, church, politics, and others, in the positive view of students’ experiences (Tieu et al., 2009).

Student experiences at university should not only involve evaluation of its learning and teaching environment, but necessitates evaluating the total student experience, including co-curricular activities. Students are consumers of higher education and gauging their overall satisfaction plays a role in many fronts such as recruitment, loyalty and retention (Celik and Akyol, 2015). Celik and Akyol (2015, p.7) stated that students’ university experience is a “web of interconnected experiences” and a consequence of complex factors, which makes it important to understand how these experiences and factors influence satisfaction. Thus, Tam (2006) asserted that quality education can be said to be the positive impacts of university experiences on student outcomes and the best way to know if it does is to ask students. This study aims to: (a) investigate the student experiences, involvement and usage of campus facilities, involvement in clubs and organizations, and art, music and theatre, and (b) identify differences between faculties in the use of campus facilities, involvement in clubs and organizations, art, music and theatre.

Conceptual framework

This study is theorized around the theory of student involvement, which “refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1999, p. 518). An involved student, for example, puts sufficient time into studying, joins university clubs and organizations, interacts with staff and students, and uses its facilities maximally. The theory of involvement is premised on five basic tenets: involvement entails physical and psychological energy invested on objects; different students portray varying degrees of involvement on objects and may do so on different objects and differing times; involvement can both be quantitative and qualitative; the amount of student learning and personal development is associated with the quality and quantity of involvement in the university and program; and the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is reliant on the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. The theory of student involvement

recognizes that the involvement of individuals on university life contributes to their persistence, whereas, non-involvement contributes to students' departure from university (Milem and Berger, 1997). Dropping out is the ultimate form of non-involvement (Astin, 1999). The general notion is that students will get more out of university if they put more into it (Webber, et al., 2013).

Method

This study utilized the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), designed to assess where students spend their efforts and what they learn as a consequence of their college and university experience (Lundberg, 2003). Measured in the CSEQ are writing experiences, campus facility use, course learning, the arts, experience with faculty, personal experiences, library use, computer and information technology, clubs and organizations, student acquaintances, science and quantitative experiences, topics of conversation, information in conversations, and gains in disciplines (Lundberg, 2003), while the first 18 items asks for the student's background (Hu & Kuh, 2003). The CSEQ measures in-class as well as out-of-class experiences of higher education students (Hu & Kuh, 2003). CSEQ is purported by Hu, Kuh, and Li (2008) to have superb psychometric properties and moderate potential to assess student behaviour associated with university outcomes. In addition, CSEQ had been used since 1979 with over 350,000 higher education students and demonstrated reliability and validity since its inception (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004) and therefore higher education institutions and researchers continue to see the utility of this instrument to measure student experiences at universities (Rocconi, 2011).

Data analysis

The scale used for the questionnaire was very often, often, occasionally and never, for all of the statements under art, music and theatre; campus facilities, and clubs and organizations.

Table 1: Means and standard deviation of art, music and theathre least experienced by university students.	Mean	Standard Deviation
Talked about art (painting, sculpture, artists, etc.) or the theater (plays, musicians, dance, etc.) with other students, friends, or family members.	2.89	1.002
Went to an art exhibit/gallery or a play, dance, or other theater performance, on or off the campus.	3.14	.885

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Participated in some art activity (painting, pottery, weaving, drawing, etc.) or theater event, or worked on some theatrical production (acted, danced, worked on scenery, etc.) with other students, friends, or family members.	3.41	.812
Talked about music or musicians (classical, popular, etc.) with other students, friends, or family members.	2.66	1.078
Attended a concert or other music event, on or off campus.	2.99	.925
Participated in some music activity (orchestra, chorus, dance, etc.) on or off the campus.	3.36	.914
Read or discussed the opinions of art, music, or drama critics.	3.12	.910

Table 1 shows that students least participated in some art activity such as painting, pottery, weaving and drawing or theater event, or worked on some theatrical production such as acted, danced and worked on scenery with other students, friends, or family members ($M = 3.41$, $SD = .812$). Related to this, students were least likely to participate in some music activity such as a chorus or dance on and off the campus ($M = 3.36$, $SD = .914$).

Table 2: Means and standard deviation of least used campus facilities.	Mean	Standard Deviation
Used a campus lounge to relax or study by yourself.	2.83	.989
Met other students at some campus location (campus center, huts, outdoor seats etc.) for a discussion.	2.39	.881
Attended a cultural or social event in the campus.	2.78	.978
Went to a lecture or panel discussion.	2.32	1.114
Used a campus Student Learning Support Service to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing, etc.).	2.71	1.023

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Used a campus Student Learning Support Service to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing, etc.).	2.71	1.023
Used campus recreational facilities (pool, fitness equipment, courts, etc.).	2.83	.995
Played a team sport or individual sport (university intramural, university club, inter-university).	3.42	.941
Followed a regular schedule of exercise or practice for some recreational sporting activity.	3.27	.975

Table 2 shows that students are least likely to play a team sport or individual sport at the university intramural, university club, or inter-university ($M = 3.42$, $SD = .941$). Related to this, students are least likely to follow a regular schedule of exercise or practice for some recreational sporting activity ($M = 3.27$, $SD = .975$).

Table 3: Means and standard deviation of functions students are least involved at clubs and organizations	Mean	Standard Deviation
Attended a meeting of a campus club, or organization.	3.32	.953
Worked on a campus committee, student organization, or project (publications, special events, etc.).	3.46	.897
Worked on an off-campus committee, organization, or project (civic group, church group, community event, etc.).	3.25	1.032
Met with a staff member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization.	3.45	.883
Managed or provided leadership for a club or organization, on or off the campus.	3.45	.924

Table 3 shows that students are least likely to work on a campus committee or student organization ($M = 3.46$, $SD = .897$), least likely to meet a staff member or

staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .883$) or least likely to manage or provide leadership for a club or organization for a club or organization on or off the campus ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .924$).

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted with Faculty as the independent variable and art, music and theater, campus facilities, clubs and organizations, as the dependent variables. In terms of campus facilities, the three faculties differed on the students attending a cultural or social event in the campus, χ^2 (d. f. = 2) = 16.817. FBE, Mdn = 3 and FSTE, Mdn = 3, are different from FALE, Mdn = 2, $p = .0005$. There were no significant differences between faculties on all other measures.

Discussions

This study found that students least participated in some art activity such as painting, pottery, weaving and drawing or theatre event, or worked on some theatrical production such as acted, danced and worked on scenery with other students, friends, or family members. Related to this, this study found also that students were least likely to participate in some music activity such as a chorus or dance on and off the campus. Students in the study were able to talk about art, music, musicians and discuss opinions on art, music or drama, but lacked participation in them. This university, referred to here as UPI, has a lot more room to develop Pacific art, music and theatre. It has a Centre with an active dance crew, an art gallery, and offers Pacific studies, but more can be done to develop Pacific art, music and theatre. The UPI Vice Chancellor commented that its Pacific studies should be among the best in the world and it should be what the university should be known for (Chandra, 2015). However, it is contradictory that the Pacific studies section is among the smallest departments within the UPI and would do substantially more to reach renowned status. The Vice Chancellor (Chandra, 2009) admitted during the passing of founding Director of the Centre, that although the university established the Centre, "it did not provide adequate resources for it to realize its objectives immediately, providing only the salaries for the Director and some staff, with little provision for activities." One of the first resident artists at the Centre highlighted the undervaluing of art at the UPI and the need for more presence (Vaka'uta, 2015). It would require far more investment to ensure Pacific studies, art, music, theatre and reach core status at the UPI. At the UPI School of Education, art and music courses are not offered anymore. Courses and positions were deleted when the art and music lecturers left. There were no efforts to replace these positions, depicting the poor status afforded to these subjects compared to other academic disciplines. Koya-Vaka'uta (2014), referring to the Pacific Islands context, emphasized that there is slow realization of arts to the holistic development of students, considered secondary to other academic subjects and seen only as a pathway for 'non-performers'. Koya-Vaka'uta points to the importance of

translating Pacific Islands' arts strategies into classroom practice as the arts often only meet academia in colourful hallways and often stop short at the classroom door (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2014). Ensuring the presence of art, music and theatre should not only be on the formal academia but through campus performances and presence.

This study also revealed that students at UPI are least likely to play a team sport or individual sport at the university intramural, university club, or inter-university. Related to this, students are least likely to follow a regular schedule of exercise or practice for some recreational sporting activity. This is telling as students perceived accessing and utilization of other campus facilities better than sporting and recreational facilities and opportunities. Students at UPI may not have a combination of not having enough recreational facilities and clubs to cater for differing interests or are not aware of them. Reed (2007) studied 467 undergraduate students and found that the majority of them were not aware of many of the recreational physical activity facilities on their university campus. Introductory sessions during orientation may help create awareness among incoming students. Physical activity facilities are a characteristic of the university campus environment and it is important to influence patterns and levels of use by students (Reed, 2007). On the other hand, there is only less than 10 active campus sporting clubs at the UPI, compared to other universities, for instance, Boston University in the US and University of Canterbury, New Zealand, have more than 30 sporting and recreational clubs, while Deakin University in Australia has about 150 clubs including sporting, recreational clubs, more needs to be accomplished to ensure recreation and sports permeate the UPI. The critique may be that the paper is unfairly comparing it with western universities, but the fact is that in terms of campus facilities, student do not use or access campus recreational activities and as a result, do not follow a regular schedule of exercise, practice or recreation.

This study found that students are least likely to work on a campus committee or student organization, least likely to meet a staff member or staff advisor to discuss the activities of a group or organization or least likely to manage or provide leadership for a club or organization for a club or organization on or off the campus. Overtly, there are not many recreational, sporting, and other clubs, within the UPI to have students being involved in campus committees and be leaders of them. Many of university clubs and organizations are usually mostly student-led and there should be more that the UPI can do to encourage and provide the correct framework in which students can lead and sustain clubs within the campus. These are imperative areas for student leadership, governance and forming valuable relationships, as Zuo and Ratsoy (1999) found that student involvement in university governance is beneficially related to the future careers of students. It also helps students understand university

operations, university-community relationships, and university-government relationships. A similar finding by Menon (2005) examined students' participation in the management of a university in Cyprus and found that participants believed that their involvement in the management of the institution was limited. Universities, therefore, can put in place measures to ensure increased involvement of students in university governance. Universities need to be open enough to receive opinions and critical comments from students. Through organizational audits university need to assess the effectiveness of student participation mechanisms (Menon, 2005).

This study found that the only measure in which a faculty difference existed was that the Faculty of Business (FB) and Faculty of Science (FS) students are least likely to attend cultural or social events in the campus than do the Faculty of Arts (FA) students. It may be found that the FA has more extracurricular activities organized in which students can participate in than do the Faculties of Science and Business. This holds some truth as the lead author attended, during the period of writing this paper, a student debate activity, a journalism awards night with myriad cultural performances, a postgraduate symposium and a Chinese language awards evening, thus the FA may have more social and cultural activities organized on a far more regular basis than the FS and FB. Tieu et al. (2009) provided an important caveat with their study of 9,780 undergraduates from five Canadian universities and found that students' involvement in extracurricular activities that are more structured related to much smoother university transition experience. This stressed the importance of highly structured extra-curricular activities so that they result in positive outcomes as they tend to provide students with high quality, meaningful and enriching experiences. Effort then should be made to provide opportunities for students to discuss with administrators of university clubs, teams, or groups as to what they would like to get out of their participation. Tieu et al. (2009, p. 354) stated that "learning that students take part in through their participation in extracurricular activities could be just as important as the learning they engage in within the classroom."

It is important that higher education providers recognize that students learn from extracurricular activities, both on and off campus, and the impact it can have on graduates and their employability. When many graduating students all go for the same job, what makes graduates and their attributes distinct from other education providers is crucial. Consequently, quality assurance agencies are increasingly requiring records of students' learning and achievements that also includes extracurricular activities in order to develop relevant professional skills and qualities for employability (Sealey, Stevenson, & Clegg, 2013). Employers are increasingly interested on not merely stating that one is committed, enthusiastic and confident, but evidence of participation in

extracurricular activities that would develop those characteristics. These and other qualities such as being resilient, well-rounded, a team worker, or a leader, do not occur by simply stating them, but through evidence of involvement in extracurricular activities such as art, drama and music, faith and cultural activities, sporting and recreational activities, political activities and volunteering. Sealey et al. (2013) thus stress the importance of higher education providers in educating their students the added value of extracurricular activities and provide the avenues from which students can be involved. It is essential that staff and educational institutions do not assume that students are involved in enriching activities besides going through the formal curriculum. There needs to be a strong platform provided by higher education institutions by which students can be involved in myriad of extracurricular activities. In addition, Thompson, Clark, Walker and Whyatt (2013, p. 135) advocated the need for higher education institutions to provide “structured institutional schemes” to enhance students’ extracurricular experiences cognizant of their career plans. Students need to be strategic in their extracurricular involvement as not all activity engagement may be beneficial. This is imperative as the quality of students’ learning opportunities, both in and out-of-classroom, contributes to quality assurance enhancement in higher education (Thompson, Clark, & Whyatt, 2013).

Conclusion

The theory of student involvement purports that effective policies and practices are reliant on the capacity of the policy or practice to increase student involvement. This theory also believes in the physical and psychological energy invested on objects: in this case, the study has argued the investment into campus art, music, theatre, recreation and sport as valuable inputs towards students’ optimal student experience at university. It is important that universities, including the UPI, to shape the educational and interpersonal experiences and settings of their campus in ways that promote maximal learning, not only in-class but out-of-class. It is vital to have a strong mechanism to induce students to become involved in university experiences and activities to exploit the various university settings and opportunities maximally. Institutional policies and practices should be oriented towards developing a climate in which students are provided opportunities for active choice and participation in art, music, theatre, recreation and sport. These areas of university life should not be considered peripheral to students’ experience and development, which calls for the deployment of resources effectively to facilitate fruitful engagement.

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