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The Relationship Between Involvement in Extracurricular Activities
and Academic Achievement of Students at Flora High School
(TITLE)

BY
Linda J. Spicer

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Specialist

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1994
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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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The Relationship Between Involvement in
Extracurricular Activities and Academic Achievement
of Students at Flora High School

Linda J. Spicer

Eastern Illinois University

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Abstract

The purpose of this field study was to determine the effect of participation in extracurricular activities upon academic achievement. Senior students at Flora High School were asked to respond to several survey questions that provided information concerning their participation or lack of participation in extracurricular activities. In addition, they expressed opinions related to their own personal involvement in extracurricular activities. The cumulative grade point averages of participants and nonparticipants were also reported.

The results indicated that the respondents of the Class of 1994 of Flora High School strongly felt that participation in extracurricular activities had an effect upon academic achievement. The cumulative grade point averages statistically supported their beliefs.

The final recommendations of this study supported the need for continued review of the effects of extracurricular participation at Flora High School. The potential value of current extracurricular programs to future students demands a systematic, ongoing evaluation by the Flora High School Board of Education and administration.

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Chapter I

Overview of Study

Introduction

Many school districts in Illinois have strived to establish goals to develop a comprehensive program that allows opportunity for maximum development of intellectual, physical and social capacities. As used here, comprehensive means inclusive of several components. Extracurricular activities are implemented to offer students comprehensive educational experiences. While programs like the Illinois Public School Accreditation Process stress evaluation of curriculum areas and related outcomes, extracurricular activities are often not evaluated as is the case with the current Illinois Public School Accreditation Process.

Students are infrequently involved in evaluating the impact of extracurricular activities. They generally have little opportunity to express their opinions in a systematic manner. This has been the case at Flora High School where no formal evaluation process has been established.

In this field experience, a small high school in Flora, Illinois was considered. In this area of rural Illinois, extracurricular activities merit much attention because they are often the focus of social life of both students and adults. In this setting, some coaching assignments and sponsor selections are based on availability of personnel, while some assignments face the same scrutiny as an administrative selection. While the

revelation of the field study was limited to a specific school, the analyzed results can be evaluated by the district to consider the continued existence of the availability of extracurricular activities. This district can professionally consider if there is a relationship between extracurricular involvement and academic success. If extracurricular activities are found to compliment the total program, then emphasis should be placed on the importance of the selection of extracurricular activities and their leaders.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between involvement in extracurricular activities and academic achievement based on the perception of senior students at Flora High School. This study sought student input as to whether participation helped or hindered academic learning. A clearer understanding of the life-long effects of extracurricular activities was sought as a source of information to substantiate benefits derived from current programs used to supplement the core curriculum.

Operational Definitions

Extracurricular activities included those student activities provided by the school. These activities were both athletic and co-curricular activities. Co-curricular activities included those that complemented and coordinated with an academic area, such as

Spanish Club, Business Club, and Future Farmers of America.

Athletic activities involved both interschool and intraschool competitions.

Academic achievement included a comparison of cumulative grade point averages of participants and nonparticipants. Cumulative grade point average referred to the final cumulative grade point average calculated at the end of the senior year.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed that high school seniors were capable of making judgments concerning the benefits of participation in extracurricular activities. The assumption was also made that students were able to express their beliefs in written responses.

Limitations

The major limitation of this study was that only one high school was involved. Inferences resulting from this study would only be relevant to similar high schools of similar size in rural areas. In addition, only opinions and statistics of seniors were utilized in this analysis. This field experience did not address the many personal variables of each student, such as aptitude, parental encouragement, and social opportunities.

Delimitations

For this study, only a portion of the seniors of one high

school were randomly selected to provide information. Money and time prohibited the involvement of other schools. Administrative decisions limited the number of participants within the one school by allowing only two classes of students to participate. Only students' perceptions were considered although many personal factors influenced the interests and beliefs of the students themselves.

Uniqueness of Study

A study of this type has not been done within this district or school. In this field experience, students were asked to express beliefs and respond freely on a questionnaire. The results and analysis of this study were presented to the Board of Education by the researcher.

Chapter II

Related Literature and Research

Review of Literature and Research

The study of extracurricular involvement is not a new field of study, especially in the athletic realm. While many studies and articles have devoted much time to the debate concerning the support or hindrance provided by the availability of such activities, there is still much to understand. The complexity of so many dependent variables and the bias of the researcher can easily influence the interpretation of results.

After reviewing many studies and articles, the contrasting results provide substance for differing opinions. The studies and data have evolved over a period of many years adding another dimension. As times change, expectations, interpretations, and relevance of programs have also changed making it more difficult to evaluate studies and results.

In a study of female adolescents, Simeroth (1987) mentioned that self-selection into extracurricular activities suggests that those students who possess higher academic aspirations simply elect to participate. Through personality inventories, Simeroth also stressed the complexity of the various factors which have inhibited clearly defined research.

According to Steinberg (1988), studies have reported that participation in extracurricular activities is more likely to

enhance than interfere with high school students' academic achievement. However, that author echoed the belief that once background characteristics that differentiate participants from nonparticipants were taken into account, the influence of extracurricular activities was modest. Surprisingly, Steinberg revealed the effects of participation appear to have the greatest impact among students with the least promising backgrounds for academic success. In a study concerning dropouts, Quinn (1991) stated that those students found to be in danger of dropping out of school were in great need of school activities that bore relevance to their lives. Those who graduated tended to be involved in school activities and to feel a greater sense of attachment and commitment to school. This correlation suggests a link between extracurricular participation and academic performance.

Feltz and Weiss (1984) found that students who participated the most in extracurricular activities were better able to manage their time and achieve higher levels of performance in several different roles simultaneously. They concluded that participation was more supportive than detrimental. Hanks and Eckland (1976) explained that even employers and selective colleges regarded participation in extracurricular activities as evidence of social adjustment.

More recently, McCarthy (1994) worked with the Colorado High School Activities Association during the Spring of 1992 and found that participants from primarily athletics and music had

significantly higher grade-point averages and a significantly lower number of days absent from school than did nonparticipants in all but the smallest schools. That author indicated that these results did not seem to be affected by socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, or at-risk factors. McCarthy's interpretation of the study was that participants benefit by learning to work with themselves in order to achieve and this lesson affects other areas of achievement.

Many high school mission statements now include goals that encompass the total development of an adolescent. This idea was reinforced by McNamara (1985), who reported that the formal curriculum alone cannot address necessary basic development needs such as responsibility, communication, and belonging. The provision of extracurricular activities was found to enhance the core curriculum by allowing adolescents to develop mature relationships, strengthen self-esteem, and acquire leadership skills. Eldsmore (1964) found a positive relationship between participation in activities and academic achievement. In addition, participants acquired socialization skills and improved race relations. Reun (1992) supported this belief by stating that the public wants us to produce people who have good report card averages, but they also want graduates with people skills and an ability to accept responsibility and follow directions. These skills are cultivated through student activity participation. He points to many successes financially, in fame, in awareness, and in self-esteem that have developed from participation in extracurricular activities.

Hong Kong secondary students participated in a survey by Fung and Wong (1991) that provided 294 responses. Their survey concluded that activity involvement was positively related to academic performance. Camp (1990) considered many variables that could impact both level of student activities and grade point averages. He too found that participation in student activities has a positive relationship to grades. In fact, he stressed the need to quickly expand research to determine if students who are faced with withdrawal of "privileges" in many schools are actually motivated to improve or to restore "privileges" or if it is actually damaging to improvement of student achievement.

Using data beyond high school, Marsh (1992) asked students whether or not they had chosen a variety of activities. He found that participation in too many activities produced diminishing returns. He did find that benefits of participation differed substantially depending on particular activities. Participation in sports, honor societies, student government, school publications, and school subject-matter clubs were proven consistently beneficial.

In contrast, Coleman (1961) argued that emphasis on extracurricular activities in high school promoted behavior that was contrary to the society's purpose of school as needed for the transmission of knowledge. Another critic, Mendez (1984) later argued that the place of extracurricular activities as a part of the public secondary school program has been taken too far.

Stevenson (1975) expressed the need for students to participate in school activities indicating that these activities were necessary to prepare adolescents for a more leisure world, due to a shortened work week. In essence, Stevenson saw extracurricular activities as preparation for adult social life. In a more recent study, Griffin (1988) identified specific benefits of extracurricular activities for student progress and reaffirmed the apparent permanent role of extracurricular activities in schools. Banner (1992) echoed this belief by stating that two schools are necessary in today's society, the academic school of arts and sciences and the afterhours school that provides sports and activities.

Reports from Steinberg (1988) noted a possible demon of extracurricular participation. He felt that compelling demands from nonacademic activities depressed academic performances. These demands were often time-consuming and did not relate to academic responsibilities. He concluded that these activities decreased the quality and quantity of study time and lessened academic excellence. Tomlinson (1992) reported that many Americans now score lower because they study less as they spend time on nonacademic activities.

As previously mentioned, the research on athletic participation in extracurricular activities has been extensive. Eldsmore (1964) found a positive association between academic performance and athletic participation. In a study conducted in 24 Iowa schools, that author found varsity football participants to have a higher

grade point average than nonparticipatory classmates. However, as in most studies, the results were not controlled for other intervening variables. In a similar study, Schafer and Armer (1968) compared grade point averages of athletes and nonathletes while controlling intervening variables. They, too, found a small positive relationship between athletic participation and academic performance.

Research conducted by Stoltz (1986) statistically revealed that athletes' grade point averages were significantly higher than nonparticipating students. In addition, fewer athletes received a failing grade during times when actively competing. However, the data again presented other areas to be examined. Athletes could have used time more efficiently during competition. Perhaps motivation for eligibility was particularly strong. While these findings were consistent with previous findings, many facets remain to be explored.

In contrast, Schumaker, et al (1986) found athletes' grade point averages to be insignificantly higher than nonathletes, although the athletic group did score higher on a measure of self-concept. In previous studies, Lueptow and Kayser (1973-74) and Hauser and Lueptow (1978) found no greater increase over time in high school grades among athletes than nonathletes. They concluded that group differences in grade point averages that others had observed were probably a function of pre-existing differences

between athletes and nonathletes, rather than factors associated directly with participation in high school sports.

Summary

The literature has revealed the difficulty in assessing the many immeasurable influences that control academic achievement. The researcher has found that considering only the domain of extracurricular activities, as it is linked to academic achievement, limits our understanding on the effects of participation. In addition, behavior and performances are clearly affected by many external factors. Awareness of these factors adds complexity to the interpretation of many existing studies. Although the overall research has been somewhat inconclusive, the topic still deserves attention and further consideration locally and nationally.

Chapter III

Design of the Study

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study were as follows:

1. What percentage of respondents participated in at least one extracurricular activity while in high school?

2. What percent of the students surveyed felt that extracurricular activities helped or hindered their academic achievement?

3. For those respondents who felt that involvement in extracurricular activities helped their academic achievement, what examples did they list to support their beliefs?

4. For those respondents who felt that participation in extracurricular activities hindered their academic achievement, what examples did they list to support their beliefs?

5. For those students who individually participated in at least one extracurricular activity while in high school, what benefits did they list which resulted from participation in extracurricular activities?

6. For those students who did not participate in at least one extracurricular activity while in high school, what reasons were given for not participating?

7. What percentage of respondents did not participate in at least one extracurricular activity while in high school?

8. For those students who did not participate in extracurricular activities while in high school, what other activities (outside of school) were they involved in that helped prepare them for adult life?

Sample and Population

The population of this field study included seniors of Flora High School. To avoid disruption and provide convenience, the principal suggested that the researcher choose two sections of Senior Political Science. This course was required for all seniors and the students were randomly scheduled. This allowed the researcher to personally administer the survey.

The researcher chose to survey the first two morning classes so there would be no time for student discussion or manipulation. The students received no advance notice. These two sections of classes accounted for a total of 40 seniors in the Class of 1994.

Criterion Measure

The survey tool, as presented in Appendix A, was developed to elicit responses to research questions formulated for the study. The instrument was designed through the assistance of the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. David Bartz. It was then approved for use by the principal of Flora High School, Mr. Harry Penry.

While the tool was developed to find actual numbers concerning

participation in extracurricular activities, it also was designed to allow freedom of responses for student opinions and beliefs.

Data Collection

After the survey instrument was approved by both the author's advisor and the principal of Flora High School, the researcher discussed the survey procedures with Mr. Penry. He suggested that the sample be obtained by surveying sections of a required senior class. The researcher chose the first two sections of Senior Political Science, and gained permission from Mr. Jim Baird to distribute the surveys to those two sections on May 17.

On that day, the researcher distributed the survey to the students, and instructed them to read the introductory paragraph of the survey. The researcher then made herself available for questions and circulated within the room for individual inquiries. The students had very few questions or verbal comments.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using percentages and qualitative statements of the respondents. The qualitative statements were analyzed by denoting the frequency of commonality in statements and depicting the trend of the statements in a collective sense.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

The format for reporting the results first restates the research question and then presents the information from the criterion measure that answered it. A narrative provides a conclusion.

Results of Research Question #1

1. What percentage of respondents participated in at least one extracurricular activity while in high school?

Response Information

37/40 93%

Conclusion

This group of students actively participated in at least one extracurricular activity. Many of the respondents answered with a detailed list that included many activities.

Results of Research Question #2

2. What percent of the students surveyed felt that extracurricular activities helped or hindered their academic achievement?

Response Information

Helped 27/40 68%

Hindered 1/40 3%

Conclusion

Of the 37 students who had participated in extracurricular activities, 27 of those felt it had helped their academic performance. Only one felt that participation had hindered academic performance. The remaining nine students responded that participation neither helped nor hindered their academic performance.

Results of Research Question #3

3. For those respondents who felt that involvement in extracurricular activities helped their academic achievement, what examples did they list to support their beliefs?

Response Information

Table 1
Examples of Extracurricular Activities and Benefits

Activity	Example	Responses
National Honor Society	Encouraged performance level	9
Scholastic Bowl	Acquisition of Knowledge	6
Yearbook and Locust Log	Writing and organizational skills	3
Japanese and Spanish Club	Learning culture and language	2
Sports	Created win attitude Physical fitness	2 1
General	Developed social relationships Time management skills Developed responsibility Developed cooperation Provided alternative activities from work Showed competitiveness of society Developed work ethic	6 5 2 1 1 1 1

Conclusion

The students responded in a variety of ways. Some students specified the extracurricular activity that developed a particular skill. Many of the students responded very generally by just listing the ways their involvement had helped them. Those who supplied information on this question seemed very eager to provide lots of information. The number of responses was in no way linked to the number of respondents. However, overall, the students provided a substantial list of the benefits derived from their participation in extracurricular activities while at Flora High School.

Results of Research Question #4

4. For those respondents who felt that participation in extracurricular activities hindered their academic achievement, what examples did they list to support their beliefs?

Response Information

None

Conclusion

The respondents provided no reasons for their beliefs.

Results of Research Question #5

5. For those students who individually participated in at least one extracurricular activity while in high school, what

benefits did they list which resulted from participation in extracurricular activities?

Response Information

Table 2
Types of Benefits Derived from Participation

Benefits	Responses
Group cooperation for a common goal	17
Communication and social skills	11
Acceptance of responsibility	11
Time management	7
Self-discipline	6
Commitment	4
Self-confidence	4
Necessity of goal-setting	4
Decision making skills	3
Development of work ethic	3
Development of maturity	2
Leadership techniques	2
Acceptance of defeat	1
Money management	1
Organizational skills	1
Importance of physical preservation	1

Conclusion

The students provided many and varied responses to this question. Again, the number of responses was unlimited so they

responded very freely. Many of the responses were similar to those supplied by Research Question #3. However, some benefits appeared that were not previously mentioned.

Results of Research Question #6

6. For those students who did not participate in at least one extracurricular activity, what reasons were given for not participating?

Response Information

Table 3
Reasons for Nonparticipation in Extracurricular Activities

Activity	Example	Responses
General	Did not like people	1
	Did not want to	1
	No extra time, chose to study	1

Conclusion

The respondents provided only one answer per student and it was very brief.

Results of Research Question #7

7. What percentage of respondents did not participate in at least one extracurricular activity while in high school?

Response Information

3/40 8%

Conclusion

A very small percentage of this sample chose not to participate in extracurricular activities while in high school.

Results of Research Question #8

8. For those students who did not participate in extracurricular activities while in high school, what other activities (outside of school) were they involved in that helped prepare them for adult life?

Response Information

<u>Type of response</u>	<u>Responses</u>
None	2
Employment	1

Conclusion

Two of the three students responding to this question were involved in no other outside activities. One student did fill other time with employment.

Statistical Results

Response Information

Table 4
Statistical Results of Respondents

<u>Respondent information</u>	<u>Responses</u>	<u>Grade point average</u>
Respondents feeling that participation helped	27	4.21
Mean of participants	37	4.05
Mean of nonparticipants	3	3.91
Respondents feeling that participation did not help	10	3.62

Conclusion

The mean of nonparticipants of extracurricular activities was slightly less than the mean of participants of extracurricular activities.

Chapter V

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this study was to survey senior students of Flora High School in an effort to obtain their opinions concerning the effects of extracurricular participation on academic achievement. Students were asked to reveal involvement in various activities. Participants of extracurricular activities were asked to express beliefs concerning the benefits derived from participation.

The researcher hoped to collect data that would be helpful in determining the importance or lack of importance relating to the offering of extracurricular activities to students in Flora High School. As an administrator, the researcher hoped to validate the interest and expense of providing extracurricular activities or find support to eliminate the interest and expense of unnecessary educational provisions.

This particular group of students had a 93% participation rate in at least one extracurricular activity. Many of the respondents provided detailed lists of not only high school extracurricular activities but also activities of the community. Of the 37 participants of extracurricular activities, 27 perceived that participation had helped them attain academic achievement. The mean of their cumulative grade point average was 4.21. This

statistic was considerably higher than that of the ten respondents who did not feel that extracurricular participation had helped. These respondents had an average cumulative grade point average of 3.62. The entire group of 37 participants statistically accumulated a mean of 4.05. This mean was just slightly higher than the 3.91 grade point average of three nonparticipants. Quite interestingly, one of the three nonparticipants had a very high average of 4.86. Because the number of nonparticipants was limited, the statistic was not as representative as the researcher would have desired.

The one respondent expressed the belief that participation partially hindered academic achievement. The student created a new choice, "a little bit." He then commented that practicing a sport until 7:00 p.m. created less study time. Even this one student could not strongly point out a true detriment from his participation.

These results lead the researcher to believe that the statistical information and beliefs of the students concur. Their experiences in extracurricular activities do seem to at least be linked to academic success. Although the researcher considered no other intrapersonal factors, the study did reveal that those students who attained academic success were drawn to extracurricular activities and their participation was perceived by the students to help their achievement.

The respondents freely provided many examples of skills acquired through participation in extracurricular activities. The greatest frequency of commonality was linked to academic extracurricular activities. Scholastic Bowl and National Honor Society offered acquisition of knowledge and required performance levels. As the researcher expected, students expressed the importance of social relationships and time management skills. The 27 students who believed that participation in extracurricular activities had helped their academic achievement provided 40 support responses. The most meaningful responses linked specific extracurricular activities to definite examples of skill acquisition. Many responded generally because the example could be supplied by various organizations.

The study revealed a number of responses concerning individual benefits derived from participation in extracurricular activities. The most common response showed that students strongly benefited from group cooperation to achieve a common goal. This is a skill they have viewed as valuable as they are entering or preparing to enter the work force. Closely related, and also revealed as important, were communication and social skills and acceptance of responsibility. Tied in very closely were time management and self-discipline skills. Commitment, self-confidence, work ethic, goal-setting, and decision-making skills were also provided as strong benefits derived from participation.

In reviewing those responses of students who chose not to participate, the researcher found brief comments. Ironically, the one respondent with the cumulative grade point average of 4.86 did not give a response linked to the desire to study.

Of the three respondents who chose not to participate in high school activities, two of those also chose not to participate in any activities outside of the school. This leads the researcher to believe that students may enter high school with a predetermined attitude toward participation in extracurricular activities. As previous research has discussed, perhaps these students do not enter high school with the personal desire to become involved with people and extracurricular activities.

Recommendations

The interpretation of this data leads the researcher to conclude that the inclusion of extracurricular activities at Flora High School are a meaningful provision of the total educational curriculum. The senior students already possess awareness of the benefits they have perceived as derived from their participation. This research should lead administrators of Flora High School to accept the value of the investment in extracurricular activities.

Considering future recommendations, the administration of Flora High School should formally adopt a procedure to annually review not only attitudes and statistics concerning participation

in extracurricular activities, but also include an assessment of changing needs.

Staff members in all schools that currently provide extracurricular activities must surely believe that the availability of such activities is needed. However, each district must devote some attention to formulating an evaluative system to substantiate the perpetuation of extracurricular activities. While this research sought the beliefs of senior students, there is a possibility that former students could also provide valuable insight.

Although it would be quite intricate, the psychological aspects of need fulfillment through participation in extracurricular activities would be interesting to explore. The variety of extracurricular activities in many high schools leads us to believe that different competencies are sought for internal satisfaction. While these benefits are hard to measure and may not be statistically related to a cumulative grade point average, the need to consider them is necessary.

As revealed through the review of related literature, the variables are numerous and research is often not totally conclusive. But our students, especially high school teens, have needs that must be met in a changing society that forces adolescents to seek various attachments. As educators, our expertise is supported by our efforts to substantiate the purpose of all educational facets.

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Appendix A

Survey Tool

Please help me gain information for a study I am completing through Eastern Illinois University by completing the following questionnaire.

Name _____

Please list those extracurricular activities in which you have been involved while in high school.

1. Do you feel involvement in school extracurricular activities has helped you achieve academically?
(Perform better in your classes)

Yes _____ No _____

- A. If yes, list examples of how or why your participation helped your academic achievement in school.

- B. If no, did participation hinder your academic achievement?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, explain how.

2. Assuming you participated in extracurricular activities, list as many benefits as you can of how you think participation may have helped you in preparation for adult life.

3. Assuming you did not participate in school extracurricular activities, why did you chose not to participate?

4. If you did not participate in school extracurricular activities, did you participate in other activities that helped you prepare for adult life?

Yes _____ No _____

- A. If yes, please describe activities and why you chose those activities instead of school extracurricular activities.
