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How Seriously Do You Take Your Leisure?

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1. Setting the Scene

Approximately three-quarters of university students and recent graduates in the United Kingdom report having lower levels of self-perceived subjective well-being than when the COVID-19 pandemic began (Donald & Jackson, 2022). Additionally, the pandemic exacerbated the challenges universities face in fostering social mobility and preparing their students for sustainable careers (Donald & Ford, 2022). The pandemic also caused significant disruption to learning and opportunities to gain work experience, meaning that graduates entering the labour market are some of the least prepared to undertake the university-to-work transition (Dougherty et al., 2022). Moreover, university career advisors are struggling to meet the demands of students and recent graduates for career counselling support (Buckholtz & Donald, 2022). Subsequently, we need to consider pragmatic ways to address these challenges within the constraints of the resources available to students. We propose that one such option is to encourage students and graduates to participate in Serious Leisure.

2. Defining Serious Leisure

The field of leisure studies distinguishes between Casual Leisure and Serious Leisure (Stebbins, 1992). Casual Leisure is undertaken primarily for enjoyment and pleasure, whereby the benefits are short-lived. Examples include watching television, reading a book, or attending a concert. In contrast, Stebbins (1992, p. 3) defines Serious Leisure as

the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that participants find so substantial and interesting that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a career centred on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge and experience.

Serious Leisure adheres to the broader construct of Leisure since it can help to restore personal resources and temporarily guard against the depletion of additional resources due to education, work, and life demands.

3. Potential Benefits of Serious Leisure

Nimmi and Donald (2022) explored the impacts of participating in Serious Leisure by looking at graduates in India. They found that participating in Serious Leisure was positively associated with self-perceived employability and workplace well-being. Furthermore, these associations were stronger when graduates' stress levels were high. In other words, graduates can use Serious Leisure as a way to (a) improve their self-perceived employability, (b) enhance their workplace well-being, and (c) manage high levels of stress. Their recommendation was for employers to provide opportunities for graduate employees to participate in Serious Leisure activities to enhance their career sustainability and the organisation's productivity.

These findings are fascinating since students report reduced mental and physical health, struggles with academic studies, and concerns about their competitiveness in the labour market (Donald & Jackson, 2022). We propose the need for future research, specifically looking at university students to see if the benefits for graduates can be replicated. If so, universities should encourage students to participate in Serious Leisure activities to improve their health and well-being, manage stress levels associated with their studies, and enhance their self-perceived employability in preparation for their transition into the labour market. Participation in Serious Leisure would also align with calls for university students to engage in lifewide learning achieved via various experiences at any given time (Cole & Donald, 2022).

4. Conclusion

We propose that university students consider taking their leisure pursuits more seriously. University career services may wish to encourage their students to undertake Serious Leisure and explain the potential benefits. Further empirical research is, however, required.

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