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**Does Participation in a University Campus Organization Impact a Student's
Success and Participation in Class?**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in
School of Human Ecology

By
Ashby Smith

Under the Mentorship of *Dr. Alice Hall*

ABSTRACT

This research study discusses how students' participation in one or more university campus organizations can impact grades and course success. Fliers were distributed across campus with a survey QR code to get a representative sample of students. Results were analyzed by types of organizations, types of responses to open-ended questions, gender, course hours, and the amount of responses received. Results were similar to prior research which indicated an overall positive impact on grades and course success. These results can be used for further research when looking for similar studies at different universities and colleges.

Thesis Mentor: 

Dr. Alice Hall

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Dr. Steven Engel

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Does Participation in a University Campus Organization Impact a Student's Success and Participation in Class?

My research study investigated how participation in one or more university campus organizations impacts students' academic success and course participation. The Survey questions used to help investigate my research question included multiple-choice and open-ended questions that asked for information on the types of clubs' students are in, how much time students spend with club activities, what their opinion is on the impact their clubs make on their GPA, and other similar topics. Research was collected via fliers that displayed QR codes and word of mouth. This form of data collection led to some limitations but was helpful in accessing students across campus.

Literature Review

Monthlongo (2002) documented the benefits of college organizations, including overall satisfaction with the college experience, social experiences, leadership opportunities, academic autonomy, and more. He reported that by participating in student organizations students are able to get to know college life overall with the variety of opportunities that organizations offer. Despite these overall positive findings, the study had the limitations of the sample group of predominantly middle-class white students in predominantly white organizations. This led to the findings not having many contributions from minority groups or organizations that are more diverse.

Knifsend (2020) surveyed college students at California State University, where they collected self-reports to measure extracurricular participation, its correlation to the collective self-esteem of those who participated in one or more organizations as they related to academic outcomes. Although they received data that involvement in activities

led to a greater sense of belonging, further research would need to be done to understand how a larger demographic group would react to this study due to the sample size being predominantly female. Additionally, including grade point average or other variables may help with further research based on this study.

Another similar study completed at Clemson University (Powers, 2008) focused on the life satisfaction of college students by measuring different aspects of their life including academic achievement and social activities, including structured social activities such as clubs and teams. The results of the survey showed that the correlation between structured involvement and life satisfaction was not significant and that academic achievement was positively correlated with life satisfaction. These findings are helpful in that they showed overall student life satisfaction.

Buckley & Lee (2021) studied college students in Ireland about their personal opinions on participation in extracurricular activities to help identify how they felt extracurricular activities benefited them. This was an open-ended survey that resulted in many results that show how there are different benefits to participating in an organization, including the impact on academic performance. This study used open-ended questions and focused more on skill development aspects versus academic performance. This study was done at a university in another country, so the results may not be similar to university experiences in the U.S.

Bergen-Cico & Viscomi (2012) completed a longitudinal study, over several semesters, looking at students' grades throughout the semesters and the relationship that they had with the events and the attendance students had within the events. The results showed that students who attended more events had a higher GPA and that there was a

positive association between the two. There were limitations to this study such as there are certain associations within the topic that still need further research. For example, some of the correlation between the two aspects may be due to different student demographics that were not looked at in much detail.

Alfano & Eduljee (2013) completed research with a sample of residential and commuter students looking at involvement levels and employment and how they relate to their academic performance. They also take into consideration how the two different groups of participants, residential and commuter students, feel about whether or not they consider themselves a part of their college community. These results were found through a survey of statements that asked whether or not the participants agreed. Data included correlations between the two sample sizes and how their work schedule correlates with their GPA. Additionally, it included how there are different levels of involvement in school-sponsored extracurricular activities depending on whether they are commuter or residential students. One other piece of data that is included in the data is on feeling whether they are included or not in the college community. Although, a limitation was that the sample sizes were small due to this being conducted at a private college with only one hundred and eight students included in the study. More research needs to be done with a larger sample size of more than one hundred and eight undergraduate students at a private college.

Elkins, Forrester, and Noel-Elkins (2011) investigated the levels of involvement out of class and how that affected the participants' sense of campus community in different aspects by having students at an institution in the Midwest answer an online questionnaire. Results overall yielded those students that had a high level of involvement

had a sense of campus community in certain aspects such as a greater sense of community in the teaching and learning factor, which is one of the six factors from the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) used in this study.

Strap and Farr (2010) looked at the connection between types of involvement in psychology-related extracurricular activities and the participants' academic performance relating to psychology majors for their research. Data collected indicated that the satisfaction of participants depended on what psychology activities they were involved in. Different activities, such as being involved in a club or psychology honors society, also led to different aspects of satisfaction such as the amount of satisfaction in the overall experience of being involved in a club versus the psychology honors society is different. As well as being involved in a club versus the psychology honors society led to different levels of satisfaction in the aspect of advising quality and faculty interactions. A limitation was that this focused on psychology majors leading to further research needing to be done on one other major as well. Further research could show the results in other majors and also help show long-term outcomes of involvement.

Webber et al. (2013) asked a question (only one question) to survey students of a university in the Mid-Atlantic region to help show the effects of involvement on students' GPA by focusing on two components, academic/classroom activities and outcomes and cocurricular measures. To analyze the data collected a Chow Test was used to show the regression of the data sets between first-year students and seniors. There were positive and negative correlations between the results in different aspects between the two different groups of students. In addition to that, there were different correlations within the different demographics of students. As well as, there are some limitations to this

study including not looking at the socioeconomic status and the data being self-reported so those who were more motivated academically may have been more motivated to answer the questions with more in-depth responses.

Overall, these studies generally resulted in a majority of positive results related to participation in extracurricular activities and their relationship to GPA and course participation. But, there were some limitations in sample sizes and the location of the studies. There may need to be more research on the aspects that affect participants or students negatively. There are also varied research questions within these different research articles including aspects of well-being versus aspects of academic success that the researchers focused on, varied sample sizes, unique modes of data collection, and more contrasting implications.

Research Questions/Hypotheses

The research question: Does Participation in a University Campus Organization Impact a Student's Success and Participation in Class? will help further understand how participation in an on-campus organization hinders or helps students. I hypothesize that Georgia Southern students' participation in one or more organizations on campus has been beneficial to not only their college experience overall but their success and participation in classes.

Method

Sample

The study population was students who attend Georgia Southern University. Participants were required to be actively participating in at least one on-campus club or organization. Each subject participated in one survey that took

approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. Students were informed by word of mouth and fliers that were posted throughout campus within several academic buildings, Russell Union, Williams center, Dining Commons, and the RAC upon approval. The flier was posted to social media outlets, including GroupMe, and Facebook. Participants completed an online survey on Qualtrics about their student organization participation and how their involvement in those extracurriculars has impacted their grades and class participation. The survey questions included multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The survey was also advertised without using incentives.

Assessments and Measures

My assessment was a survey created to assess the Georgia Southern students who are active and participate in one or more on-campus organizations to answer my research question. The survey included the student's demographic information, their GPA, what club or clubs they are participating in, how they feel participating in the club has influenced their academic performance and participation, and what form or category of club or clubs they participate in. Several short answer questions were asked at the end of the survey. This survey helped assess whether or not students felt participating in an on-campus club or organization helped them or hindered their academic success. In order to do this the survey had statements prompting the participants to choose whether or not they 1. strongly disagree, 2. disagree, 3. neither agree or disagree, 4. agree, or 5. strongly agree by using the Likert scale. It also included open-ended questions such as "How would you describe your academic success before joining an organization or club?" and "How would you describe your academic success after joining a club or organization?"

(See appendix A). For students who completed less than 80% of the survey, the data were not analyzed.

Results

The survey received twenty-one responses (N=21). The majority of the data obtained was from seniors in college ($n=7$), and ages ranged from eighteen to twenty-three years old. Seven of the twenty-one participants strongly agreed that their student organization helps support their academic performance, which helps show favor in positive relations with organizations and academic success (refer to table 1). Ten of the participants also disagreed that their organization or organizations get in the way of their academics (refer to table 1). Therefore, these results help explain more favorable agreement for participation in an organization over dissatisfaction in participation compared to their academic success. The respondents were from various clubs, including social fraternities and sororities, spiritual, academic, and service with a few participating in more than one. The categories selected by participants were social fraternities and sororities, academic, service, spiritual, professional, sports, diversity education and advocacy, honorary, cultural, and creative and performing arts. The type of student organization most students listed was a social fraternity or sorority ($n=13$) and the second was academics ($n=9$) (refer to table 3).

Out of all the survey respondents, the majority were female ($n=17$) and white ($n=18$). Respondents' ages ranged from eighteen to thirty-one, with the majority ($n=14$) being eighteen to twenty-three years old. The participants ranged in class standing with most classified as a junior ($n=6$) or senior ($n=7$).

The open-ended questions in the survey explained their academic success and GPA before and after their participation in one or more on-campus organizations. Participants could self-report their institutional GPA. The results from one of the five open-ended questions: how would you describe your academic success after joining a club or organization, explained how students felt that joining a club or organization mostly had a positive impact or not much impact on their academic performance. Seven students indicated a positive change, such as "it helped me get with peers of the same major" and "very successful." Ten students felt little to no change by stating "Same as it was before" or "It has not changed, I am still academically successful" or something similar. Negative responses included statements such as "My grades started going down the drain the semester after I joined."

Survey statements number eight through thirteen included the answer options of 1. strongly disagree, 2. disagree, 3. neither agree or disagree, 4. agree, or 5. strongly agree (refer to table 1). These statements helped gauge the participants' opinions on the topic. Results indicated that the participants strongly agree with the statement that their organization helps support their academic performance (refer to Table 1). Results also explained that the majority of the participants disagreed with the statement that their organization gets in the way of their academic performance (refer to Table 1). Overall, the results showed what impact students feel that participation in an organization makes on their academic success, GPA, and balance of time with coursework.

Discussion

As hypothesized, tables four and two show that overall participation in clubs and organizations positively impacted a student's academic performance and participation in

class. Yet Table 1, indicated both positive and negative impacts on academic performance. Similar results have also been found by Strap and Farr (2010). Although Strap and Farr focused on psychology students, they also looked at how different types of extracurricular involvement impacted satisfaction in the research participants.

Also, prior research found that there are a number of benefits and different aspects that impact students' experiences with extracurricular activities (Buckley & Lee, 2021). Buckley and Lee's (2021) findings were similar to my findings in that they relate to the variation in results of students' opinions about extracurricular activities and how they have impacted their college experience and academics.

The goal of this study was to get information from a diverse population of participants in multiple different and diverse on-campus organizations and clubs. This study received results from the majority female population (refer to table 2). This can relate to Kinsfield's results as their sample size was predominantly female. The results of the study did not receive as large and diverse sample size as aimed due to fewer results than expected, but allowed for sufficient analysis.

Limitations and Further Directions

One limitation of the research is that these results were collected from Georgia Southern University, a university with 27,000 students in South Georgia. Previous literature has shown that different colleges and universities have similar, but not identical, results. If this study was conducted at another university of a different size or student population, then the results may contrast these results due to different demographics and different sample sizes relating to the different colleges or universities.

Another limitation of this study was time constraints. The sample size is relatively small compared to the population of the university which is 20,000 on this campus. There were fewer responses than expected using a relatively new form of data collection with QR codes. With more time for data collection, then the sample size would be larger and there may be more accuracy and variation within the results.

A future direction for this project would be to post the flier several times over a longer period of time to get a larger number of students to respond. Students might not have seen it the first time it was posted but might have seen it the second or third. More participants could get a wider perspective and a broader range of data. In addition, speaking to on-campus clubs and organizations might help to get more students to respond. Participants for this research were majority female, and this aspect could change that to have more males participate in the research.

Data was collected through QR codes which is a relatively new form of data collection. This new form of data collection leads those who are uninformed about this data collection to possibly be deterred from participating. This data collection may also need to be further advertised for the general public to be more informed about the process of using a QR code and the process of how scanning it directs them directly to the survey.

Reflective Critique

I have learned about social science data collection from this research project and I am learning. I have learned how to work with time constraints and limitations that I have with being an undergraduate student. There have been many factors that have played into time constraints including multiple topic changes, a mentor change, and a late start to the

project. With all of these playing into account, I was able to still conduct research and receive results for this project.

I have also learned how to research literature for my literature review.

Researching literature for this project has shown me how to use different platforms in order to find literature that is relevant to my research topic. Researching literature has also shown me that sometimes there just is no literature published on certain topics or aspects of this topic.

I have also learned more about how to collect data and what data analysis is. I am definitely still learning about how to analyze data, but this has helped me greatly with new knowledge on the subject.

Table 1

Results from Likert Scale Questions

Variables	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. I am actively participating in my club or organization. (If more than one organization please answer relating to the organization you spend the most time on)	2	1	2	5	11
9. My organization helps support my academic performance. (If more than one organization please answer relating to the organization you spend the most time on)	2	1	6	5	7
10. My organization gets in the way of my academic performance. (If more than one organization please answer relating to the organization you spend the most time in)	6	10	2	2	1
11. My organization takes more time than my coursework. (If more than one organization please answer relating to the organization you spend the most time in)	5	6	5	4	1
12. I am generally successful in my classes and classwork.	1	0	1	8	11
13. My organization(s) makes an impact on my classwork and participation in class. (If more than one organization please answer relating to the organization you spend the most time in)	2	5	8	3	3

Table 2
Demographics of Participants

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Age		
18-20	5	23.8
21-23	9	43.9
<23	1	4.8
No answer	6	28.6
Gender		
Male	2	9.5
Female	17	81
Non-binary or gender queer	2	9.5
A better description not specified	0	0.0
Prefer not to answer	0	0.0
Race/Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	1	4.8
White	18	85.7
Asian/Asian American	0	0.0
African American/Black	2	9.5
American Indian/Native American	0	0.0
Multicultural	0	0.0
A better description not specified above	0	0.0
Prefer not to answer	0	0.0
Class Standing		
Freshman	4	19.1
Sophomore	3	14.3
Junior	6	28.6
Senior	7	33.3
Graduate Student	1	4.8
A better description not specified above	0	0.0
Prefer not to answer	0	0.0

Table 3
Multiple choice and other Questions

Questions	n	%
1. Which of the following ranges includes your institutional GPA?		
4.0-3.50	11	52.3
3.49-3.00	8	38.1
2.99-2.50	0	0.0
2.49-2.00	1	4.8
1.99-1.50	1	4.8
1.49-1.00	0	0.0
2. How many Georgia Southern University registered student organizations do you participate in?		
1 organization	8	38.1
2 organizations	10	47.6
3 organizations	2	9.5
4 organizations	0	0.0
5 or more organizations	1	4.8
3. What are your organization or organizations that you participate is categorized as? (check all that apply)		
Academic	9	43.9
Cultural	1	4.8
Service	4	19.1
Professional	2	9.5
Social Action	0	0.0
Sports	2	9.5
Social Fraternities and Sororities	12	57.1
Honorary	2	9.5
Diversity Education and Advocacy	2	9.5
Creative and Performing Arts	1	4.8
Peer Mentorship	0	0.0
Spiritual	7	33.3
Special Interest	0	0.0
Other	1	4.8
5. How long have you been actively participating in at least one club Or organization?		
Less than one semester	0	0.0
Less than one year	9	42.8
1-2 years	6	28.6
More than two years	6	28.6
6. How much time do you spend attending events for your organization(s) Weekly?		
<1 hour	2	9.5
1-5 hours	12	57.1
6-10 hours	5	23.8
11-15 hours	1	4.8
16-20 hours	0	0.0
21-25 hours	1	4.8
More than 25 hours	0	0.0
7. How many credit hours are you taking this semester?		
Less than 12 hours	1	4.8
13-15 hours	15	71.4
16-18 hours	4	19.0
More than 18 hours	1	4.8

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. Which of the following ranges includes your institutional GPA?
 a.4.00-3.50 b. 3.49-3.00 c.2.99-2.50 d.2.49-2.00 e.1.99-1.50 f.1.49-1.00 e.<1.00
2. How many Georgia Southern University registered student organizations do you participate in?
 a.1 b.2 c.3 d.4 e. 5 or more
3. What are your organization or organizations that you participate in categorized as ? (check all that apply)
 a. Academic b. Cultural c. Service d. Professional c. Social Action d. Sports e. Social Fraternities and Sororities f. Honorary g. Diversity Education and Advocacy g. Creative and Performing Arts h. Peer Mentorship i. Spiritual j. Special Interest k. other (please specify)_____
4. What are the names of the organization or organizations that you participate in? (Please include all that apply with no abbreviations)
5. How long have you been actively participating in at least one club or organization?
 a. Less than one semester b. Less than one year c.1-2 years d. More than 2 years
6. How much time do you spend attending events for your organization(s) weekly?
 a. <1 hour b.1-5 hours b. 6-10 hours c.11-15 hours d. 16-20 hours e.21-25 hours f. more than 25 hours
7. How many credit hours are you taking this semester?
 a. Less than 12 hours b. 13-15 hours c.16-18 hours d. More than 18 hours
8. I am actively participating in my club or organization. (If more than one organization please answer relating to the organization you spend the most time on)
 a. Strongly disagree b. Disagree c. Neither agree nor disagree d. Agree e. Agree strongly
9. My organization helps support my academic performance. (If more than one organization please answer relating to the organization you spend the most time on)
 a. Strongly disagree b. Disagree c. Neither agree nor disagree d. Agree e. Agree strongly

10. My organization gets in the way of my academic performance. (If more than one organization please answer relating to the organization you spend the most time in)

a. Strongly disagree b. Disagree c. Neither agree nor disagree d. Agree e. Agree strongly

11. My organization takes more time than my coursework. (If more than one organization please answer relating to the organization you spend the most time in)

a. Strongly disagree b. Disagree c. Neither agree nor disagree d. Agree e. Agree strongly

12. I am generally successful in my classes and class work.

a. Strongly disagree b. Disagree c. Neither agree nor disagree d. Agree e. Agree strongly

13. I am generally successful in my participation with my organization or organizations.

a. Strongly disagree b. Disagree c. Neither agree nor disagree d. Agree e. Agree strongly

14. My organization(s) makes an impact on my classwork and participation in class. (If more than one organization please answer relating to the organization you spend the most time in)

a. Strongly disagree b. Disagree c. Neither agree nor disagree d. Agree e. Agree strongly

15. How would you describe your academic success before joining an organization or club?

16. How would you describe your academic success after joining a club or organization?

17. How did you hear about this survey?

Demographics

1. What is your age?

2. What is your gender?

a. Male b. Female c. Genderqueer or non-binary d. A better description not specified e. Prefer not to answer

3. What is your race/ethnicity?

a. Hispanic/Latino/Latina b. White c. Asian/Asian American d. African American/Black e. American Indian/Native American f. Multicultural g. A better description not specified above h. Prefer not to answer

4. What is your class standing?

a. Freshman (0-29 credits) b. Sophomore (30-59 credits) c. Junior (60-89 credits) d. Senior (90 or more credits) e. Graduate student f. A better description not specified above h. Prefer not to answer