

Exploring participation in co-curricular activities among undergraduate students

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Abstract

Co-curricular activities offer an opportunity for students to develop and demonstrate employability skills. Not all students take advantage of activities on offer, while others undertake multiple activities. In this study, second and third year students from two related undergraduate degree courses who had and had not taken up co-curricular activities identified their reasons for participating or not, and completed two questionnaires exploring their motivation (Academic Motivation Scale, AMS and Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire, MSLQ). First year students identified which activities they would be interested in participating in in future years, and why. Clear differences in participation between the two degree courses were seen, with significantly higher levels of intrinsic motivation among students who participated. Among those who did participate compared with those who did not, significant differences in different types of motivation were seen. Self-efficacy was also significantly higher in those who did, compared with those who did not, participate, although whether this is a cause or a consequence of participation is unclear. First year students indicated interest in a range of co-curricular activities, for personal as well as academic reasons. Further work is needed to ensure that all students understand the relevance and importance of co-curricular activities.

Introduction

Employability is a major issue for students and institutions (Pegg et al., 2012). Embedding employability within higher education is a key priority (Higher Education Council for England (HEFCE), 2011) to ensure that graduates are equipped to meet workplace demands (Pegg et al., 2012). Producing graduates with skills and competencies which they can apply to real life challenges within the working world is a challenge within busy academic curricula. Co-curricular activities offer additional opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate employability skills. Co-curricular activities are usually voluntary and offered outside the curriculum but complement it (Higher Education Academy (HEA), 2015). Their value in helping students to bridge the gap between knowledge and its application is recognized (Winter et al, 2012, 2015; Andrews, 2013). However opportunities are only of use if students take advantage of them, so it is important to understand why students choose to participate or not.

Under the Nutrition umbrella at KU there are two separate but related degrees; the BSc Nutrition (Human Nutrition) and BSc Nutrition (Exercise and Health). Both are three year full time degrees, but they differ in their focus and emphasis. The BSc Nutrition (Exercise and Health) (NEH) is 50% sport and exercise science (including psychology) and 50% nutrition; while the BSc Nutrition (Human Nutrition) (Nut) focuses on nutrition, physiology and biochemistry and their application to health

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