LEARNING INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Five Benefits of Getting Involved in Co-curricular Activities
“If we attempt to act and to do things for others and for the world without deepening our own self-understanding, our own freedom, integrity and capacity to love, we will not have anything to give to others.”

- Thomas Merton

Before you know it you will be loading luggage into your car, moving into a dorm room and saying good bye to your parents as you transition to college life. As you approach orientation week and beyond, it won’t take long for you to learn about all the opportunities available to you. While it is tempting to stop at every table and put your name on every list, take your time and thoughtfully evaluate all of the clubs, on-campus activities and organizations that are offered to you, being careful not to take on too much too soon.
As you consider which activities align the best with your interests and skills, keep in mind that what you learn outside of the classroom can often be just as important, if not more important, than what you learn inside the classroom. According to Steve Ivester, Dean for Student Engagement at Wheaton College, “The number one thing students gain from engaging in co-curricular activities is a greater sense of self-awareness. This involvement goes far beyond building a resume and really centers on the development of the whole student. At Wheaton College, student engagement is the ‘applied laboratory,’ giving students a place to live out what they have learned in the classroom.”

The Student Learning Project, initiated by the American College Personnel Association, states that “learning and personal development are cumulative, mutually shaping processes that occur over an extended period of time in different settings. The more students are involved in a variety of activities inside and outside the classroom the more they gain.”

While it is difficult to fully list the wide variety of benefits co-curricular activities offer, five major benefits are outlined on the following pages.
As you engage in co-curricular activities you get the opportunity to expand your worldview by becoming more aware of the needs of others. There is nothing more valuable than being able to apply all you learn in the classroom to real-life situations and needs that span your surrounding community and the world.
Since you are leaving your family and many friends behind, getting involved helps you develop a new community of friends with similar interests. In addition, you will feel more connected to your school by cultivating friendships with faculty and staff, in addition to older students. Some of these may even become the kind of friendships that last a lifetime.
Sometimes the scope of a classroom doesn’t give you the space to truly discover your passions and strengths. Clubs, student government and other activities often give you the platform to be creative, develop leadership skills and truly understand how you can apply your gifts. These activities bring clarity to what you are passionate about and can illuminate your strengths in new ways. You may be surprised what you learn about yourself!
In an increasingly competitive job market, freshman year is not too soon to begin thinking about positioning yourself for future employment. It’s not enough to just get good grades; it’s important to also focus on doing all you can to develop your leadership skills outside the classroom. In the eyes of prospective employers, they often are more interested in how you led a team or impacted a club or organized a group of people to accomplish a goal. These skills have a direct carry-over to the workplace.
It’s no secret that a busier person often accomplishes more than one with too much time on his or her hands. This will vary from student to student, of course, but more free time does not always equal better grades. Being involved in co-curricular activities requires more organization and time management on your part, and these skills will transfer over to the rest of your life.
Finding your niche on campus can be much easier said than done so here are tips to consider as you look for co-curricular opportunities:

1. **Utilize your school’s resources.** Whether it is housed in a student development office or online, most universities have some sort of student engagement center that lists every campus organization and gives information on how to get involved. Some even offer quizzes to help determine which activities fit your areas of interest.

2. **Try clubs or activities at least once and push yourself outside of your comfort zone.** Oftentimes the most rewarding experiences result from challenging yourself to do something that you aren’t comfortable doing. Do not be afraid to stretch yourself; college is the perfect time to exceed your own expectations.

3. **Realize that being involved is an ongoing process.** Involvement on campus shouldn’t be solely restricted to permanent positions or groups. Be on the lookout for temporary activities too, like service projects or campus event planning. Find out if there is an involvement or community service newsletter you can subscribe to in order to stay current on the latest opportunities. As you become more familiar with campus and meet more people, your confidence in which clubs, organizations, and leadership opportunities to take on will grow along with you.

Student involvement experts, or current students, can offer advice on finding the right extracurricular activities for you.
Remember, your decision to get involved in co-curricular activities in college is sure to have a life-long impact on you in many ways. This is the time to jump in and just say yes!

Now that you understand more about the benefits of being involved in co-curricular activities, here’s a free download to learn more about the many ways current students find value in, and contribute to, the clubs and organizations they’re involved in – as well as a few alumni who share how college extra-curriculars have impacted their post-grad endeavors.