

Lesson 3: Intercultural extracurricular activities at Universities

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Introduction:

This lesson will describe how important it is to develop intercultural awareness and benefit students' extracurricular activities (ECA's). Through theoretical and practical examples, it will also be faced the theme of internationalisation at home, virtual mobility and extra curriculum activities online and mutual intercultural benefit for students who share their intercultural background and expertise in ECA's.

The topic is elaborated in the following chapters:

- 1) The background of extracurricular activities (ECA's)
- 2) Internationalisation, virtual mobility and intercultural activities (teahouses)
- 3) About internationalisation and extra curriculum activities online
- 4) Benefits for students and university

1. The background of extracurricular activities (ECA's)

Nevitt Sanford (1956), who was a renowned expert professor of ethnic studies at the University of California, suggested some years ago that **students learn best when they are both challenged and supported**.

Students should be challenged by the learning course content and new skills. In contrast, the classroom environment, teaching strategies that provide opportunities for them to learn in their preferred learning style, supports them and content that includes people's perspectives from their own ethnic, class, and gender groups¹.

Although many college classrooms contain a diversity of students, most college faculty know little about the effects of culture or about **communicating across cultures**.

It has been found that **activities such as music and dance, public service, interscholastic team sports, and student government all improved students' likelihood of getting into college**. These activities provided opportunities to increase one's self-esteem and investment in school life. Such ECAs may benefit students by helping them to stand out, defy expectations, and appear unique among their peers². Certain **ECAs** undertaken at the leadership level can give better access to large firms, job security and protection against unemployment. Participation in solitary activities, the social sector or citizenship activities, on the contrary,

¹ Nevitt Sanford (1956), *Inclusive Teaching: A Workshop On Cultural Diversity*, UNL

² Kaufman and Gabler, (2004) *Do extracurricular activities in schools improve educational outcomes? A critical review and meta-analysis of the literature*, International Review of Education

can sometimes disadvantage students' labour market entry, leading to unemployment, less job security and lower occupational status.³

Eide and Ronan (2001)⁴ have shown that students' participation in competitive sports may positively affect future earnings, although this differed according to students' ethnic background. Other research suggests that participation in sports, clubs, and societies has benefited graduate employment prospects for younger students only. Taking part in ECAs did not improve mature students' job prospects. Still, younger students who spent more than 10 hours per week on ECAs were more likely to succeed in their subsequent employment.⁵

However, even under different perspectives, all studies show how a significant proportion of students appeared to be missing out on opportunities to develop and engage in social networks at university and were missing out on the strategic potential of ECAs in achieving employment objectives.

Therefore, it is clear that there is a need for a **better understanding of the long-term impacts of extracurricular activity**, as relatively little research to date has examined the role of extracurricular activities on student life and future career prospects, emphasising student demographics. However, research undertaken with high school students suggests that students' engagement with ECAs varies across gender, social class and ethnic group.⁶

The definition of ECAs is broad and includes all activities beyond 'the classroom', such as involvement in university clubs and societies, paid and voluntary employment, family commitments, religious activity and internet activities.⁷

In research of **Nebraska University (C. Wadsworth)**⁸ has been examined the engagement of various student demographic groups in various university and non-university linked ECAs, as well as the qualitative perception of ECAs on employment prospects by student alumni, and finally the views of actual employers, to assess differences in student experiences, outcomes (marks) and career trajectories.

In this research:

- some successfully employed alumni (n = 12) were asked to reflect on the ECAs they did at university and their effect on their university performance and subsequent employment.
- Alumni were all employed at the managerial level, including design consultancy, hardware sales, IT, immigration officership, charity directorship, government policy, lecturing, human resources and marketing.
- The ECAs, the alumni, had engaged in also ranged widely from part-time work, university/student union activities (for example, pub quiz organiser, events manager), university clubs (for example, philosophy, sports, rowing, choir) and external community activities – volunteering, family commitments, acting as DJ and more.

Most alumni emphasised the **social aspect of ECAs**, describing them as an **important opportunity to network and make new friends**. Some socialised with people from university clubs, particularly sporting clubs, which often met around the student union pubs and bars. In general, all alumni described how the social networks

³ Guy Tchibozo (2005), Effects and Strategic Potential of Extracurricular Activity in Higher Education, University of Sydney annual conference proceedings

⁴ Eide and Ronan (2001), Is participation in high school athletics an investment or consumption good?: Evidence from high school and beyond, Econ papers, 431-442

⁵ Blasko Z (2002) Access to What? Analysis of Factors Determining Graduate Employability. Bristol: HEFCE.

⁶ Brown R and Evans WP (2002) Extracurricular activity and ethnicity: Creating greater school connection among diverse student populations. Urban Education 37(1): 41–58.

⁷ Stewart, E. C., & Bennett, M. R. (1991). American cultural patterns (2nd ed.).

⁸ C. Wadsworth (1992), Inclusive teaching, -workshop Nebraska University archives

they made in ECAs helped them to find jobs or to progress within their chosen careers, some directly, others indirectly via their social contacts helping them with job placement⁹. **All stated that friendship networks from the university were still important within their social and working lives, even years after university, as they had helped them to feel socially supported to carry out their jobs more effectively.**

Many of the younger alumni said that social activities were important for developing:

- their self-confidence,
- their sense of wellbeing
- happiness at university.

Some talked about activities in terms of their social development and maturity, leading to social skills, which they came to rely on in their later careers. Many alumni described how activities had given them transferable skills that they later brought to the workplace. Despite that, some ethnic minority alumni said that they were not involved in certain activities because they did not feel welcomed by or a part of their students' union. Some of the mature student alumni, irrespective of their ethnicity, claimed that many ECAs were not accessible. However, they also reported that their studies and career were their main university priority. As they had been fee-paying students, many working student alumni discussed financial and time constraints concerning ECA participation. Some alumni wished that they had done more ECAs. Voluntary work, in particular, was an activity that many students regretted not having done, seeing it as important for job opportunities.

To summarise, from this research emerged in conclusion that:

<u>Alumni:</u>	<u>Employers:</u>
There was general agreement from the alumni that ECAs had been beneficial to their initial job searches and that the social networks made at university had been either directly or indirectly linked to their current career paths. Most felt that ECAs were now of little or no importance to their CVs, given that they had more life and work experience to support their applications. However, some still referred to their ECAs in job applications, especially for activities where they had played a central or leadership role, reached a certain level of achievement or felt were still important to their sense of identity. Only one particular ethnic minority alumni said that they would have engaged more in activities had their students' union been more welcoming or had their university offered more activities targeted at mature students' interests and compatible with their external responsibilities.	They were generally in agreement that ECAs were useful in demonstrating key skills and competencies sought by a graduate employer, as well as 'cultural fit' with the company (that is, seeking sociable, outgoing and extroverted graduates who would fit in well with colleagues and communicate effectively as part of a team). Employers highlighted work experience and clubs and committees (especially leadership roles), voluntary work, and team sports as key ECAs. However, some valued university linked team sports over voluntary work, positions on university councils and student union activities. This was particularly the case with computer science/IT employers, who advocated team sports as the best indicator of fit with the workplace. In addition, employers emphasised the importance of graduates 'selling' their activities by being aware of the skills they had taught them and using illustrative examples. This suggests that

⁹ Blasko Z (2002) Access to What? Analysis of Factors Determining Graduate Employability. Bristol: HEFCE.

	students benefit from careers advice from their universities regarding ECAs.
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2. Internationalisation, virtual mobility and intercultural activities

Linked to the process of student mobility, there is also the concept of "internationalisation" in Higher education, which refers to international student mobility and is also related to privileged political, geographical, and economic factors (Adey, 2010: 170).

It is also important to highlight that given the exponential growth of the phenomenon of student mobility, it is no wonder that student mobility is often seen as the face of internationalisation and, at times, is used interchangeably with the term. However, internationalisation is definitely more than student mobility (Knight, 2012:21).

However, "internationalisation" is becoming a catch-all phrase now, used to describe anything remotely linked to worldwide, intercultural, global and international. Indeed, it means a series of international activities (such as academic mobility for students and teachers), international networks and projects, and new international academic programmes for some people. One noteworthy development in the **conceptualisation of internationalisation has been the division of internationalisation into "internationalisation at home" and "crossborder 16 education"** (Knight, 2012:23): these two pillars are separate but closely linked and interdependent.

IaH reminds us that the concept of internalisation is not simply about providing mobility opportunities, but that it is also crucial in learning environments, emphasising the need to reach all students, not simply the mobile few (Beelen & Jones, 2015: 68). At the same time, it provides a framework for incoming student mobility to support the internationalisation of teaching and learning and focuses on incorporating local intercultural opportunities into curriculum internationalisation.

Generally speaking, for almost all the stakeholders about Virtual Exchange, it often emerges that it is an incomplete experience. Most of them suggested that it could be integrated with a final meeting of the people joining the programme. However, everyone underlined that it could not be compared to a mobility experience, claiming that it is a more superficial experience and cannot substitute for a physical mobility experience.

But the **covid19 pandemic completely changed the perspective** and speeded up a process already on the road. As a result, not only curricular activities but **also extracurricular activities can be internationalised at home.**

There are many ways to learn from international experiences, and you can organise extracurricular activities that bring internationalisation home. Universities must necessarily be supportive in this, providing space or promoting different activities in various ways.

But let's do some **practical examples of possible Extra curriculum activities related to intercultural exchanges at home:**

➤ Cooking dishes of different countries, with the help or the advice of international students (social dinner)
➤ Trying to organise some sessions with "international" games (board games, group games, identity playing games). The games can also be of other countries, not necessarily those familiar in the host country. This can favour a mutual enrichment
➤ Aperitif or social multilingual dinner/lunch break: where the rule is only to choose in which language to speak. It can be English as lingua franca or the language of exchange students that other local students are studying or vice versa;
➤ Karaoke night with songs from many countries
➤ City tours: local students can guide international students on a tour of the city
➤ Cinema night and discussion: organise a session where educative movies are watched, also in the local language with foreign language subtitles
➤ Sports activities: with the support of the educational department of a university, some can be organised some matches and team games that also involve students from different cultures, promoting integration through sport

From these activities, local students can learn more about foreign cultures and replicate some of these activities or even develop new actions based on what they learned from international students. For example:

➤ They can replicate the dishes they cooked with foreign students in "cooking sessions" where only local students participate in a sort of "challenge cooking show."
➤ They can replicate some foreign games and keep practising the words of the foreign language they learned.
➤ They can organise only "foreign songs karaoke" events to test their singing capacity in another language.

It is clear that contact with international students can also be useful for developing internationalisation at home.

From experience learned by international students, creating a local physical space where both exchange and local students can interact and stay connected seems to be the ideal situation for a concrete application of intercultural benefits gained.

The ideal physical space (A Friend Tea House) should be a student-friendly and student-dominated multicultural environment that welcome diversity and multiculturalism and support international students' welfare.

It should be possible to plan several activities or even just chill and talk in a space like that. Sometimes is outside classrooms of Universities and in social ties that relies on the actual internationalisation process.

3. About internationalisation and extra curriculum activities online

More and more universities worldwide are offering online or hybrid options for Masters degree studies. They range from fully remote study to an on-campus experience in which some instruction takes place online. As a result, students now have more choices than ever and can find a programme that fits their preferences and lives.

Whichever model students select for their studies, there are many ways to engage in extracurricular activities. The covid19 changed ultimately academic life, and it also affected social and extracurricular activities. But **Online or hybrid study does not mean student life should take a back seat**. After all, getting a Masters degree entails much more than learning new information in class.

Experiential learning such as solving business cases or conducting an experiment may or may not be part of your curriculum. In either case, extracurricular activities can boost real-life skills and confidence and do not have to be left behind.

To promote possible extracurricular activities, online can be developed University Online clubs for students or dedicated platforms to find activities buddies.¹⁰ University may (for example) also be offering online training sessions through their gym or physical education department.

Another extracurricular activity that can be promoted by Institutions and easily be done online is:

- tutoring younger students or providing support to people from marginalised groups
- coach a high school student who is struggling to keep up with their maths classes
- teach English or another language to refugees.

Every university has (or should have) student humanitarian organisations that will be able to point you towards ways you can help. Working for a cause will allow students to feel focused and grounded and develop skills such as communication and teamwork. If they want to work in the non-profit sector after graduation, this can also lead to a future career.

Extracurricular engagement helps grow, whatever the learning format – immersive on-campus studies, blended, or online.

¹⁰ Cohen S, Kamarck T and Mermelstein R (1983) A global measure of perceived stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 24(4): 385–96.

4. Benefits for students and university

Furthermore, it is helpful to focus on how useful it is the mutual intercultural benefit for students who share their intercultural background and expertise in extracurricular activities. In fact, this exchange allows students to:

- **Learn new skills:** extracurricular activities allow students to learn something that could stay with them for a lifetime. Directly, that skill could be the basis of a hobby or passion that enriches their life for many years. Everything from playing sports to learning an instrument could lead to hours spent doing something they enjoy. Beyond that, extracurricular activities instil key skills and personality traits that can be helpful in other walks of life. For example, sports are key to developing teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving skills using the same examples. A musical instrument requires perseverance, hand-eye coordination and, above all, creativity. To experience different points of view can improve the quality and enrichment deriving from learning.
- **Broader social skills:** The nature of many extracurricular activities means that students will be engaging with other children in a social setting. Away from the classroom, it's a good opportunity for them to mix with something they all enjoy. This gives them a chance to develop their social skills, meet new friends and become more confident communicating in groups. Extracurricular activities can also aid in the development of self-esteem and confidence. It is gratifying to succeed in something we enjoy, especially after working hard to achieve it. A good self-esteem is an essential tool for positive mental health and wellbeing. Intercultural social ties can improve knowledge and respect for diversity and different ways of thinking and living. Spending time with children from diverse backgrounds who have similar interests; working together on realising a goal: participating in a sports tournament, preparing for a play, practising for a concert, editing the school newspaper – these are all activities that teach children friendship, communication, understanding, and tolerance. These are not just skills important for personal development but abilities crucial for realising a career in the 21st century. A student needs to be able to be a part of a larger whole, to contribute to its achievements, to exchange opinions and resolve disagreements, and to cooperate with different people – all these factors will enable them for future cooperation within organisations of various sizes, with people from all over the world. Employers in the 21st-century job market have special.
- **Improve time management:** Extracurricular activities also give students a great tool to learn necessary time management skills. Through balancing school life and an after school club, for example, students will begin to lay the foundations for skills, which will benefit them at later stages of their education, and in the steps, they will take post-education.

To summarise, numerous studies and practical examples have shown and continue to show how extracurricular activities can benefit students. Even more so if these activities manage to connect individuals from different cultural backgrounds, thus allowing for mutual enrichment and fruitful dialogue. Even if doing online extracurricular activities keeps being difficult, many efforts in this sense should be made. In this way, the distance will be only physical, without affecting the social sphere.

As a matter of fact, extracurricular activities give students a lot of opportunities to explore their existing interests or discover entirely new ones, develop talents, acquire many fun and valuable skills, and contribute through important social activities. Above all, extracurricular programs allow students to learn how to

perform in a team context, take the initiative and share group responsibility, build better focus and perseverance through competition, and enhance their attitude towards differences.

But let's **go deeper, trying to make a definitive concrete list of benefits for students involved in ECA's from the academic and lifelong point of view:**

- **Extracurricular activities serve as a great support to the regular curriculum:**¹¹ Extracurricular activities should not be viewed simply as free activities with no relation to traditional education. In fact, these activities serve as solid support to regular programs, and they must be cleverly designed and properly implemented. Furthermore, the advantages of extracurricular activities include the fact that they let the students apply their knowledge in real-world conditions.
- **Freedom and passion;** Extracurricular activities are a great outlet for students who view the regular program as somewhat stiff and confining. These activities are a way for them to find something they are really interested in, which they can dedicate themselves to with passion and focus; for some, this can turn into a profession of choice or a lifelong hobby. Also, when they find what really interests them through extracurricular activities, students usually improve their academic performance. The newly discovered passion, perseverance and focus help them perceive the big picture and inspire them to put their energy into achieving better results at school.
- Research emphatically shows that participation in extracurricular activities improves **academic performance** in reading, mathematics, grades and the general attitude towards one's own education. Perhaps surprisingly, it is not all that important which particular extracurricular activity the child participates in, as long as they approach it with engagement and dedication.
- **Encourage student's progress:** Being good at something is one of the best ways for a student to build self-confidence. This includes not settling for what has already been achieved but seeking new challenges and stepping out of one's comfort zone. These are the exact kinds of opportunities that extracurricular activities bring about.
- **Enhanced organisation and task management:** Balancing between school obligations and extracurricular activities inevitably helps students develop their time management skills, making it easier to take care of their tasks in a cleverer way. It is pretty simple – if they want to find time for everything, they will have to be well-organised. As already stated, this is an exceptionally important skill, as it will help them a lot in their later academic and professional development.
- **Valued when getting one's first job:** institutions value participation in extracurricular activities a lot – this includes sports and arts, school newspapers, community service, and doing a part-time job. Also, they prove that the student is willing to acquire new skills, have varied interests, and are ready to dedicate themselves to different goals, primarily through volunteer work. Besides colleges and universities, employers also value this sort of proof of a candidate's qualities, especially if it is the person's first job because they want people who are willing and able to advance themselves. Therefore, the advantages of extracurricular activities are quite crucial for a student's CV.
- **Many scholarship programs especially value participation in extracurricular activities.** For instance, many institutions place a high value on future students' leadership skills, so if the child is an editor of a school newspaper or a debate club president, it can play an important role when applying for a scholarship.

¹¹ Allison Academy, <https://www.allisonacademy.com/students/education/extracurricular-activities/benefits-of-extracurricular-activities/>

Besides that, **also Universities can benefit from having their students involved in extracurricular activities.** Among the most evident, it is possible to list (among others):

1. the creation of an environment conducive to academic life for students, who will also be more predisposed to invest in their choices and studies consciously
2. oriented and happy students experience academic life more and feel part of a group, they more rarely give up continuing their studies
3. Having attractive intercultural activities can be appealing to potential new enrollees and also to foreign students
4. having well-established activities not only provides benefits to students but also gives lustre and importance to the university
5. Having a more involved staff also means growing the university from an internal development point of view and allowing for faster internationalisation at home as well

While the advantages are manifold on both sides, it is critical to keep in mind that cultivating extracurricular activities offers wide-ranging gains that allow for increased cross-cultural perceptions and allow for greater readiness on the part of the institution to provide a learning and leisure environment that offers 360-degree benefits.

To stimulate further creativity on the intercultural topic and extracurricular activities, here there are some helpful links:

Intercultural stimulation activities	Classic Intercultural Simulation Activity - Five Tricks - YouTube
Intercultural competence	Intercultural Competence (Part 1) - YouTube
Intercultural communication	Intercultural Communication - YouTube
extracurricular activities for college application	Top 5 At-home Extracurricular Activities for College Applications - YouTube
Intercultural communication at university	Intercultural Communication - YouTube

With these premises, and having outlined the crucial and beneficial role of extracurricular activities for intercultural exchange and enrichment, the importance of protecting and promoting diversity at all levels of academic and non-academic life emerges with even greater resonance.

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