

Is it important to get involved in extracurricular activities?

The answer to this question is a resounding yes! And today it's even more important. First, what do we mean by extracurricular activities? Extracurricular activities are any activities a student does that are outside of the required academic curriculum. Examples include sports, jobs, clubs, just about anything that you don't do for a grade or is required to graduate.

Does it matter what activities I get involved in? The short answer to this question is yes, but it's not that simple. Participating in any extracurricular activity is better than not participating in any. However, selecting the right activities can make a world of difference in helping find a job. Let's look at some examples.

Student A is a very social animal. He is a Computer Science major and is active in intramural sports, has pledged a fraternity where he is the vice-president of entertainment, and works at the local restaurant as a waiter.

Student B is also social. He is a Computer Information Systems major and has joined the student chapter of the Association of Information Technology Professionals (AITP) where he is responsible for the after meeting socials. He also competes in the regional and national database and networking competitions. He also works for a local church maintaining and upgrading their church database.

Now the question is, if you were a manager hiring an entry level database administrator which student would you hire? Of course we have incomplete information here. We would probably like to know what their GPA's are, has Student B won any database awards, and what is Student A's main technology interest. Every listed extracurricular activity says a lot about the capabilities of the both students. They are good quality activities that show teamwork, leadership, and time management skills. But when it comes down to making a hiring decision it's a little more targeted. The manager who is looking for a database administrator knows that Student B has an interest in database and technology simply by the fact that they are involved in activities that are directly involved with it.

This is not to say that every activity that you get involved in has to be associated with what you want to do. This is especially hard if you're not sure what you want do yet. What is important is that you get involved as early as possible. Find out what is available and get involved in something. Find those activities that can help you develop as a student and not work against you. Once you know what it is you want to do then start looking for opportunities to get involved in activities that use or are associated with that career field.

What are the types of activities that you have access to? You would be surprised how many there are, no matter what your major. For example, for students in my program of Computer Information Systems at Texas State University we have a host of opportunities for all students from freshmen to seniors. We have the student chapter of AITP that meets monthly and bring in speakers on a variety of topics. It also sponsors participation in regional and national competitions in a variety of areas including database, networking, systems analysis, Microsoft applications, application development, PC troubleshooting, and others. We have our own soccer team. We attend monthly professional AITP meeting in Austin and San Antonio. Have a special, by invitation only class, that is targeted to provide additional support and opportunities for student that show above average initiative and interest in the area of CIS. We have opportunities to mentor freshmen and sophomore CIS majors as well as high school students. We participate in college based activities that support business and present additional opportunities to network with business professionals. Finally, we have a variety of internship opportunities that provide the best experience and resume material there is.

While this is all great and sounds fun, just how important is it really to get involved? It is more important today than ever before. I did a simple review of our graduates from the last semester. Of those students who were involved with a variety of career based activities, were part of the invitation only class, and had participated in competitions, they all had jobs before graduation with an average starting salary of \$65,000. Of the remaining students, at the time of graduation, none of them had jobs. Of those who found employment shortly after graduation, the average salary was \$40,000. While this was just one semester and most likely doesn't reflect our typical graduate experience it does demonstrate that getting involved can have a significant impact on your future.

So don't be afraid and make the choice to get involved!!!

If you have any questions, comments, suggestions, or would like further information please feel free to contact me.

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