

ABSTRACT

Activities, Extracurricular Activities and Their Outcomes

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Research universities provide opportunities to students not only in the classroom, but also outside. Previous research suggests that some of these extra-curricular opportunities are associated with student academic success. However, previous studies provide mixed results about the relative significance of these opportunities. In this paper, we examine the association of student participation in undergraduate research opportunities, study enhancement activities (such as Study Abroad and internships), and extracurricular activities on academic outcomes. Academic outcomes include: GPA, degree aspirations, self-reported skill gains, and hours spent studying. The analyses incorporate a standard battery of campus, major, and student demographic controls.

The study shows that undergraduate research opportunities are among the most important opportunities that UC provides to its undergraduate students. Students participating in undergraduate research activities have higher GPAs and degree aspirations and spend more time studying. Participation in faculty research is associated with higher perceived math gains. By contrast, internships and study abroad programs show fewer and generally more modest associations with academic outcomes. Participation in student government and Greek organizations have insignificant or negative associations with academic outcomes, but participation in community service activities is associated with positive academic outcomes.

The study indicates that some campuses are excelling in providing important opportunities to their students. UCI is a leader in research experiences for undergraduates; UC Davis is a leader in academically enriching internships; UC Berkeley is a leader in honors program participation; and UCLA, UC Berkeley, UCI, and UC San Diego tie as leaders in community service. The results of this analysis can help UC policy makers determine, not only which non-classroom activities make a difference for students, but also which of the campuses may serve as models for the other campuses.

We conclude by suggesting ways to improve UCUES measures of research, study enrichment and extra-curricular activities so as to develop a better understanding of the relationship between out-of-class opportunities and academic gains.