

## **V11 Denbigh 2 Friday 7 December 12.00-12.30**

### **'I've got work experience purely through asking': a Critical Exploration of Extracurricular Activities and Employability (0351)**

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## **LITERATURE**

Extracurricular participation in the context of higher education refers to a broad range of activities that students are involved in above and beyond their university degree, usually operationalised as lists (Bartkus et al. 2012). Lehman (2012) for instance looked at a narrower list of extra-credential activities (career-related employment, internships, volunteer work, and study abroad/travel), whereas Stuart and colleagues' (2009 & 2011) definition encompasses all activities beyond the classroom, including family commitment. Greenbank (2015) assesses the contribution of activities 'outside the formal university curriculum' to the 'personal capital' of students (see also Holdsworth & Quinn 2010; Roulin & Bangerter 2013; Stevenson & Clegg 2011; Tchibozo 2007;), with Jones (2017, 6) suggesting that extracurricular activities are an integral 'microsystem' of student life.

The literature also points to equity issues that derive from the push toward extracurricular participation (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Stuart et al. 2009 & 2011; Stevenson & Clegg 2011). For instance, based on two different longitudinal studies, both Purcell and colleagues (2013) and Bathmaker and colleagues (2016) show that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to participate less in extracurricular activities, pointing to the lack of time, financial resources, and networks. Similarly, Clegg and colleagues (2010, p 616) point to the exclusionary aspects of extracurricular activities, due to them being 'based on an image of the student as full-time, funded, without caring responsibilities, and discursively positioned as white, able-bodied, normatively male and single'.

## **METHODS**

With a longitudinal design, the 2013 cohort are tracked throughout their university degree. The research gathers information from the home, undergraduate, full-time entrants of 2013 via using the student record data, and interviewing a subset of students on a yearly basis. The project focuses on the non-traditional student. Using tuition fee waiver eligibility as a definition, this research oversampled the poorest 10% of students who entered the English Red Brick University in 2013. Our sampling strategy was achieving maximum variation at case as well as unit level, meaning first we picked 2 or 3 departments in each faculty with diverse degree programmes; second, we matched a non-fee waiver student to a fee waiver student within the sampled departments. With 40 students taking part in the initial data collection cycle, students were interviewed yearly to reflect on their student experience ( $n_1 = 40$ ;  $n_2 = 40$ ;  $n_3 = 38$ ;  $n_4 = 33$ ).

## **RESULTS**

Building on the research literature on extracurricular activities (Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2011; Milner et al. 2016; Purcell et al. 2013; Tomlinson 2008; Tomlinson & Holmes 2016), this paper conceptualises

extracurricular activities as ongoing organised activities above and beyond the academic commitments of an undergraduate programme. Two main aspects of the findings are discussed in this paper. First, it looks at the temporal aspect of participation, second, it outlines the diverse, changing and interlinked motivations for engagement, pointing to the difference in extracurricular activities of those in receipt of a fee waiver and those not gaining such support.

In terms of a timeline of participation, extracurricular activities were, first, continued from the pre-university space into ERBU: students who took immediate advantage of opportunities offered tended to take their own participation for granted. Second, seeing their university time as the time for experimentation, other students tended to take up new activities within this new period. Third, in some cases extracurricular participation was deferred, with some students remaining disengaged throughout the university years. Although all students experienced what can be described as an 'imperative of doing', this latter group of students tended to quote academic duties, socialising, external responsibilities, or what they perceived to be a lack of fit with mainstream student culture.

With regards to the diversity of motivation in participation, extracurricular involvement initially serves as a means to find like-minded others and belong to different university communities. Tinto's work on retention suggests that such engagement is crucial (1975 & 2007). A second motivating factor is to give back to a broader community: making a contribution via volunteering and fundraising, joining liberation campaigns, becoming student representatives, or taking up outreach positions. Third, sports especially were often recognised to enhance wellbeing, both physical and mental, suggesting the need to create some time away from the academic duties. Finally, extracurricular activities were of course recognised as adding 'value' to the student's future employment potential, and as such, pointing beyond the here and now of university life. Students used their extracurricular engagement more and more to both trial potential career paths, but also to build their evidence of employment-related activities.

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