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# The Influence of Extracurricular Diversity: How Involvement in Multiple Spheres Enhances College Applications in the United States

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***Abstract:*** This research investigates how participating in diverse extracurricular activities enhances college applications in the United States. It explores the definition of extracurricular diversity, its impact on admissions, and the benefits of multidimensional involvement. The study includes case studies and student perspectives, offering insights into the evolving landscape of U.S. college admissions.

*Index Terms:* ***Extracurricular Activities, Extracurricular Diversity, College Admissions, College Applications***

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Background

#### 1. Definition of extracurricular diversity

Extracurricular diversity refers to the breadth and variety of a student's involvement in activities beyond the traditional academic curriculum. This encompasses a wide range of pursuits such as clubs, sports, community service, arts, leadership roles, and any other non-academic engagements. In the context of this research, extracurricular diversity emphasizes participation in multiple spheres, showcasing a student's multifaceted interests, skills, and contributions.

#### 2. Significance of extracurricular activities in college applications

Most noteworthy schools receive an increasing number of applications each year from incredibly accomplished students while the number of spots stays roughly the same.[1] At schools like Stanford and Harvard, acceptance rates have plummeted to around 5 per cent overall in recent years. Rates are even lower among regular decision

[1] Shemmassian, Dr. Shirag. "Extracurricular Activities for College Admissions: The Ultimate Guide (Examples Included)." Shemmassian Academic Consulting. Shemmassian Academic Consulting, 7 Dec. 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.

applicants vs. early action or early decision applicants.[2] Most colleges in the US lay emphasis on extracurricular activities. Colleges rely on these activities by students to gain insights that coursework and test scores cannot reveal.[3] These activities help you demonstrate leadership, management, and commitment, enhancing your candidacy and differentiating you from applicants with similar credentials. That's why presenting a robust and diverse extracurricular profile is important.[4] These activities also help the Admission Offices gather their thought about your level of commitment and your determination to learn.[5] The approach of participating in tons of extracurricular activities to appear well-rounded usually helps students stand out.[6]

### B. Thesis Statement

#### 1. Arguing that Involvement in Multiple Spheres Enhances a Student's College Application:

The thesis of this research asserts that a student's involvement in multiple spheres significantly enhances their college application. Rather than narrowly focusing on a single area, diversifying extracurricular engagements allows students to develop a broader skill set, exhibit adaptability, and contribute to a dynamic campus environment.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Historical Overview of Extracurricular Involvement

#### 1. Evolution of the role of extracurricular activities in college admissions

The first extracurricular activities began in the United States in the 19th century. In the beginning, they were an additional part of the normal academic schedule and included some practical or vocational interests. The first well-known extracurricular activities were literacy clubs at Harvard and Yale University. [7]

They were literacy clubs that consisted of different debate clubs and Greek systems such as fraternities and sororities. Students in American schools were the first to initiate athletic clubs. These soon became popular and literacy clubs began to decline. Around the time of World War I, schools started adding clubs such as journalism, and newspapers. Today about 1in 4 students participate in academic clubs.[8]

#### 2. Shifting perspectives on the types of activities valued by colleges

Initially, colleges placed greater emphasis on traditional extracurriculars like sports and student government. Students often make the mistake of thinking that their only options for extracurriculars are the clubs offered by their high school, volunteering, or working with well-known organizations. However, contemporary perspectives embrace a broader spectrum of activities, including community service, entrepreneurship, and artistic pursuits, reflecting changing societal values and student interests.

The admissions committee pays special attention to your extracurriculars because it tells them more about you as a person. By looking at the activities you choose to participate in in your free time, they get to learn about your interests and the key qualities you possess. They can also gauge how you can contribute to your future college campus community.[9]

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[2] IBID

[3] The Red Pen. "Extracurricular Activities: Everything You Need to Know for US College Application." The Red Pen. 3 Aug. 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.

[4] IBID

[5] Baweja, Aanchal. "What Makes Extracurriculars so Important?The Headmaster." The Headmaster. The Headmaster, 10 Aug. 2022. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.

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[7] U., Cheryl. "Extracurricular Activities - the History and Benefits of Involvement for Youth." LinkedIn. 8 Mar. 2018. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.

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[9] "What Are the Best Extracurriculars for College?" BeMo®. BeMo Academic Consulting Inc., 15 Nov. 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.

When it comes to extracurricular activities, it is important to know that quality is always more important than quantity. Colleges aren't looking for a laundry list of extracurricular activities; they are more interested in how committed you are to these activities and how they shaped you as a person.[10]

### B. Studies on the Impact of Extracurricular Diversity

#### 1. Previous research on students involved in multiple spheres

According to Eccles (2003), children and adolescents in the United States spend more than half of their waking hours in leisure activities.[11] According to Gardner, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2008), participation in organized activities during high school is positively associated with educational, civic, and to some extent, occupational success in young adulthood.[12]

#### 2. Findings related to the perceived benefits by college admissions officers

In recent years, many colleges and universities have adopted a holistic admissions approach, which means they consider all aspects of an applicant's life, not just their academic performance.[13] The sheer number of 3.9 GPAs and 1500+ SAT scores put Admissions Officers in a predicament.[14] In the final phase of decision-making, they focus on your personal story and the impact you have made in various communities. In order to tell a story or make an impact, you have to do more than study: you have to take action to influence the world around you.[15] That's why pursuing the right extracurricular activities is essential to proving that you are a compelling candidate for college admissions.

When evaluating extracurricular activities, admissions officers typically look for four criteria: initiative and commitment, impact and accomplishments, diversity and inclusion, and passion and personal growth.[16]

## III. Defining Extracurricular Diversity

### A. Types of Extracurricular Spheres

- **Academic Pursuits:** Involvement in academic clubs, research projects, or competitions that extend beyond standard coursework.
- **Arts and Creative Expression:** Participation in activities such as music, theater, visual arts, or writing.
- **Athletics and Sports:** Engaging in organized sports, whether as part of a school team or through independent pursuits.
- **Community Service and Advocacy:** Contributing to social causes, volunteering, and engaging in community service projects.
- **Leadership and Governance:** Taking on leadership roles in student government, clubs, or other organizational structures.
- **Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Involvement in business clubs, startup initiatives, or innovative projects.
- **Cultural and Diversity Exploration:** Participation in activities that promote cultural understanding, diversity, and inclusion.

[10] IBID
[11] Eccles, J. (2003). Extracurricular activities and adolescent development. Journal of Social Issues, 59(4),865-889
[12] Gardner, M., Roth, J., & Brooks-Gunn, 1. (2008). Adolescents' participation in organized activities and developmental success 2 and 8 years after high school: Do sponsorship, duration, and intensity matter? Developmental Psychology, 44(3),814-830
[13] Welker, Bryce. "How Important Are Extracurricular Activities for College?" CRUSH Your Graduate Exams. CRUSH, 13 June 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.
[14] "Top 5 Benefits of the Best Extracurricular Activities for College." Menlo Coaching. Menlo Coaching, 11 Apr. 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.
[15] IBID
[16] IBID

- **Hobbies and Special Interests:** Pursuing personal hobbies or specific interests outside the traditional academics.

### B. The Concept of Multidimensional Involvement

#### 1. Participating in activities across different spheres simultaneously

a) **Diversity in Participation:** Multidimensional involvement refers to actively participating in activities across various spheres simultaneously. This includes engaging in academic, artistic, athletic, and community-oriented pursuits concurrently.

b) **Cultivating Versatility:** The concept underscores the importance of cultivating versatility by exploring diverse interests and actively contributing to various aspects of one's personal and academic life.

#### 2. Balancing Time and Commitments Effectively

a) **Time Management Skills:** Successfully participating in multiple spheres requires strong time management skills. Students must balance academic responsibilities, extracurricular commitments, and personal life effectively.

b) **Prioritization and Goal Setting:** Achieving balance involves prioritizing activities based on personal goals, values, and the impact on personal development. Goal setting becomes crucial in ensuring effective use of time and resources.

## IV. Challenges and Opportunities of Extracurricular Diversity

### A. Time Management and Commitment

#### 1. Balancing multiple activities without compromising quality

Many students, including international applicants, think that they need to complete a specific number of extracurricular activity hours to satisfy an admissions requirement. This is not true for US colleges. None of the US colleges require a specific number of hours for extracurricular activities. Instead, they look for quality within the activities that have been completed by the students.[17]

Your extracurricular profile needs to add more to your story than just your willingness to do what needs to be done to get into college. College admissions officers are looking for interesting people who are determined to become their best version through hard work, study, and commitment.[18]

#### 2. Strategies for effective time management

Most students have a lot on their plates when they reach high school. They must balance rigorous academic classes with extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs. The key to success in both is effective time management. It is about completing the most important tasks first, eliminating distractions and knowing when to take breaks.[19]

The right balance between academics and extracurricular activities is crucial to your college experience. Extracurricular activities help shape your personality, cultivate your

[17] LLC, USA International Education Consulting. “Importance of Extracurricular Activities for College Admissions.” LinkedIn. LinkedIn, 18 Aug. 2022. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.
[18] “How Extracurricular Activities Help College Applications.” Morzep. Morzep, 8 Feb. 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.
[19] Richardson, Philip. “Art of Time Management: Balancing Academics and Extracurriculars.” Medium. Medium, 15 June 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.

skills and transform your abilities. They should not, however, come at the expense of your academics.

To effectively distribute your extracurriculars, start participating in extracurricular activities since the ninth grade, so you have plenty of time to identify what brings you more joy. Take up only those activities which you are truly passionate.Narrow the list down as you make your way through the tenth and eleventh grades. Your goal should be personal growth and service and not just checking a box. Pursue your passions and join a wide range of clubs and teams. You can also try a part-time job or take on an internship to expand your base of knowledge. Twelfth grade is going to be the year when everything comes into place for your college application.[20]

### B. Addressing Stereotypes and Expectations

1. **Overcoming assumptions about well-roundedness**

   A well-rounded education transcends the confines of textbooks and classrooms.[21] Admissions committees increasingly seek students who demonstrate a multifaceted approach to education. Engaging in extracurriculars showcases a student's dedication, passion, and ability to manage multiple commitments. It paints a comprehensive portrait of their character, demonstrating qualities that extend beyond academic achievement.

2. **Emphasizing genuine interest and passion in each activity**

   Most colleges allow any activity outside of classes to count as an extracurricular. It doesn't matter if the high school endorses the activity or if it's an activity you do through another organization or even on your own. Colleges are not necessarily seeking students who are average in everything but rather those who excel and show passion in specific areas.

   The type of extracurricular doesn't matter as much as why you're doing it. Colleges want to see you use extracurriculars to pursue your passion, experience something meaningful, increase your knowledge in your academic interest, or showcase your leadership abilities.[22]

## V. Case Studies and Examples

### A. Profiles of Successful Applicants

While there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ profile for successful applications, there are some profiles that stand out in the pool of applicants. Here are some profiles of The Headmaster students who made it to Tier I universities in the United States. Their applications were accepted by universities like Penn State, Michigan State University, Arizona State University, Babson College, Indiana University, New York University, etc.

Headmaster Student 1

This student is a successful college applicant with a rich and diverse portfolio that underscores his commitment to academic excellence, community service, and personal growth. Engaging in a multifaceted array of activities, he participated in internships, and capstone competitions, and excelled in football. His passion for the arts was evident through his involvement in poetry and music, demonstrating creativity and emotional expression. Beyond his academic pursuits, he actively contributed to community service programs like Clever Harvey -

[20] IBID

[21] Snsacd, Sanjeev S. “Balancing Academics and Extracurricular Activities: The Importance of a Well-Rounded Education.” LinkedIn. LinkedIn, 13 Aug. 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.

[22] “The Key to Choosing the Right Extracurricular Activity - Crimson Education NZ.” The Key to Choosing The Right Extracurricular Activity - Crimson Education NZ. Crimson Education, 22 Feb. 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.

JuniorMBA Tech and Tribes for Good, showcasing his dedication to social responsibility. His involvement in various online courses, including Python and Java, reflected his commitment to continuous learning and skill development. Notably, he initiated a fundraising campaign on Fueladream, highlighting his entrepreneurial spirit and desire to make a positive impact on societal issues. His academic achievements, community engagement, and diverse interests made him a standout applicant with a well-rounded and purposeful approach to extracurricular involvement.

Headmaster Student 2

This student emerged as a standout college applicant with a dynamic profile that emphasized leadership, cultural preservation, and community impact. As the founder of a student-led NGO supporting underprivileged artists, she showcased a commitment to preserving cultural art forms and supporting women artisans through successful fundraising campaigns. Her entrepreneurial spirit was evident in the development and launch of a product line using traditional Indian ingredients, generating revenue and highlighting innovation. Her dedication to the arts was reflected in 11 years of dance training, leadership of the school's competitive dance team, and extensive training in Sangeetham. Beyond the arts, she assumed leadership roles in the student council, demonstrating effective communication and responsibility. She actively contributed to emotional support through online communities and mentoring programs, showcasing her compassion and community engagement. Orchestrating National Model United Nations conferences and organizing successful fundraising carnivals underscored her leadership and organizational skills. Her multifaceted involvement, encompassing arts, leadership, entrepreneurship, and community service, positioned her as a compelling and purpose-driven college applicant.

Headmaster Student 3

This student, while not the class topper, distinguished himself with an exceptionally high degree of sports involvement, contributing significantly to his holistic profile. He excelled in the sport of 10 Meter Air Rifle, showcasing dedication, discipline, and skill in a competitive arena. Beyond academics, he actively engaged in internships and startup initiatives, demonstrating a keen interest in entrepreneurship and financial markets. His participation in programs like "Warton - Entrepreneurship" and "Yale - Financial Market" highlighted his proactive approach to gaining real-world insights. He further enriched his profile with participation in internships, including the Henley Boot Camp and Incognito Research Boot Camp, where he honed his research and analytical skills. His active involvement in the FORTI Business Competition and receipt of the FORTI Award underscored his commitment to business and innovation. His entrepreneurial spirit shone through with the establishment of his startup, Project Marksman, dedicated to the sport of shooting. This initiative not only demonstrated his passion for the sport but also showcased leadership and initiative in creating his venture. Additionally, he participated in the International English Olympiad (IEO), demonstrating a well-rounded profile that combines academic excellence with a strong focus on sports, entrepreneurship, and research.

## VI. Impact on College Admissions Trends

### A. Shaping Admissions Criteria

#### 1. Influence of extracurricular diversity on evolving admissions standards

a. **Holistic admissions approach:** The shift towards holistic admissions has prompted colleges to consider a broad range of factors beyond grades and standardized test scores. Extracurricular diversity plays a pivotal role in this approach, providing a more comprehensive view of an applicant's capabilities and character.

b. **Recognition of soft skills:** Extracurricular engagement allows admissions officers to evaluate soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, communication, and resilience. These qualities are increasingly valued in college admissions as they contribute to a student's overall potential for success and positive impact on the campus community.

c. **Purposeful Engagement:** As it turns out, top universities these days are excited about students who are ready to take on the world, and take care of it. These students are not necessarily “well-rounded” but rather deeply engaged in activities, projects,

and/or inquiries that signal to an admissions reader: "I've been practicing for the future."[23]

2. **Trends in the preferences of top-tier universities**
   a) **Emphasis on passion and impact:** Elite universities are placing a greater emphasis on the passion and impact demonstrated by applicants in their extracurricular pursuits. The ability to contribute meaningfully to a community, whether local or global, is becoming a key criterion for admission to top-tier universities.
   b) **Diversity as a strength:** Admissions officers recognize that a diverse student body enriches the academic and social environment. Top-tier universities actively seek students with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and talents, valuing the unique perspectives and contributions each student can bring to the campus community.
   c) **Leadership and initiative:** In the past few years, we have seen the word "initiative" replace the word "leadership" as the big buzz word in admissions. But that's because leadership is often misunderstood. It's often confused with titles; therefore, many students seek positions with titles that don't seem to mean very much and don't lead to noticeable results.

      Real leadership, on the other hand, involves initiative. It's displayed when students actually take action and drive change. At its best, it is creative, courageous and risk-taking. There are obvious reasons why colleges are impressed by students who display genuine leadership. Students who possess this elusive trait in high school will be sure to be leaders on and off campus.[24]

      Top colleges want passionate, lovers of learning, and future mentors to their colleagues. The admitted student profile does not necessarily look like a "well-rounded student" in the traditional sense. In fact, more often the ideal top-ranked candidate looks like a student who has thought diligently about how they want to impact the future more narrowly.[25]

B. **Future Implications and Considerations**
   1. **Continuation of holistic admissions:** The trend towards holistic admissions is likely to continue, with colleges placing an ongoing emphasis on extracurricular diversity as a crucial component of a well-rounded applicant.
   2. **Evolving definition of excellence:** The definition of excellence in college admissions is expanding to encompass a broader set of skills and attributes. Students who actively engage in diverse extracurricular activities are better positioned to showcase their multifaceted abilities and stand out in a competitive applicant pool.
   3. **Test-Optional Admissions:** Some colleges and universities have chosen to make standardized test scores an optional component of their admissions process, allowing students to decide whether or not to submit their scores. This approach aims to reduce the

[23] Morgenstern, Amy. "As Acceptance Rates Fall, Soft Skills Matter More than Ever." Blue Stars Admissions Consulting | Are you ready to get into the school of your dreams?. Blue Stars Admissions Consulting, 10 Sept. 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.
[24] Byun, Danny. "What Admissions Officers Look for in Extracurricular Activities." FLEX College Prep. FLEX College Prep, 18 May 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.
[25] Bernard, Racquel. "How Do Admissions Officers Assess the Activities List?" H&C Education. H&C Education, 10 Apr. 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.

emphasis on test scores and give students who may not perform well on standardized tests a fair chance at admission and could be something colleges continue to do.

4. **Diversity in College Admissions:** In recent years, colleges and universities have made significant strides toward increasing diversity in their student populations. This has been driven by a growing recognition of the importance of diversity in fostering an inclusive learning environment and preparing students for success in an increasingly globalized world.[26] As a result, institutions have implemented various initiatives aimed at promoting diversity in admissions, such as targeted recruitment efforts, direct admissions programs, scholarship programs, and support services for underrepresented students.[27]
5. **Online Education:** The continued growth of online education, with more institutions offering online degree programs and courses, leading to greater acceptance of online coursework in the admissions process.[28]

## VII. Recommendations for High School Students

### A. Strategic Planning for Extracurricular Involvement

#### 1. Guidance on choosing diverse activities

- **a. Self-reflection and Interests Assessment:** When it comes to choosing extracurricular activities, it's important to think of what you're truly passionate about. If you're genuinely interested in the activity, you're more likely to stick with it and excel in it.[29]
- **b. Explore the options around you:** Before selecting your extracurricular activities, you need to explore the activities around you. See what extracurricular activities your school and community might offer or what your peers are participating in.[30]
- **c. Recognize your Strengths:** Identify your strengths and find activities that allow you to showcase them. Now that you have a better idea of what you enjoy, think about the skills that you excel in. Then seek out activities that require those skills.[31]
- **d. Look for Leadership Opportunities:** Demonstrating leadership experience impresses admissions officers and future employers alike. Look for a group where you feel comfortable and consider joining early to position yourself for future leadership roles. If you come across a group that lacks organization, perhaps your leadership skills can make a difference sooner than you think.[32]

#### 2. Developing a personalized extracurricular strategy

- **a. Balance Depth and Breadth:** It's important to remember that admissions officers aren't just looking for a long list of extracurricular activities on your resume. They're interested in seeing what you've learned, how you've grown, and what kind of impact you've had through your involvement in these activities.[33]
- **b. Alignment with Academic and Career Goals:** In developing a personalized extracurricular strategy, students should ensure that some of their activities align with both personal development and future academic and career aspirations. Furthermore,

[26] Welker, Bryce. “How Important Are Extracurricular Activities for College?” CRUSH Your Graduate Exams. CRUSH, 13 June 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.
[27] IBID
[28] IBID
[29] “7 Tips to Choosing the Perfect Extracurricular Activity.” Crimson Global Academy IN. Crimson Global Academy IN, 19 July 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.
[30] Education, Crimson. “40 Examples of Great Extracurricular Activities for Colleges.” 40 Examples of Great Extracurricular Activities For Colleges - Crimson Education IN. Crimson Education, 21 Nov. 2023. Web. 27 Dec. 2023.
[31] IBID
[32] IBID
[33] IBID

meaningful extracurriculars allow you to explore various fields or subjects not available at your school, and this exposure to professionals in that industry can help solidify future career goals and expand opportunities.[34]

## VIII. CONCLUSION

In navigating the evolving landscape of college admissions, this research has explored the pivotal role of extracurricular diversity in shaping the success of high school students seeking admission to top-tier universities. The journey from traditional views of well-roundedness to the contemporary emphasis on purposeful engagement and multifaceted experiences reflects a dynamic shift in how colleges evaluate applicants.

The historical overview highlighted the roots of extracurricular activities in American education, evolving from literary clubs to encompass a broad spectrum of pursuits. Shifting perspectives on valued activities revealed a departure from the exclusivity of traditional options, embracing a diverse array that mirrors changing societal values. Studies on the impact of extracurricular diversity reinforced the notion that engagement across multiple spheres contributes to educational, civic, and occupational success.

Challenges and opportunities associated with extracurricular diversity were addressed, emphasizing the need for effective time management, authentic engagement, and overcoming stereotypes. Real-world examples and success stories showcased how purposeful engagement, rather than mere well-roundedness, can lead to favorable admissions outcomes.

Exploring the impact on college admissions trends revealed a paradigm shift where top universities value students ready to take on the world and make a positive impact. The recommendations for high school students provided practical guidance on strategic planning, emphasizing the importance of quality over quantity and aligning activities with academic and career goals.

In conclusion, the research affirms that extracurricular diversity is not merely a checkbox for college applications but a transformative journey for personal growth and development. The narrative has shifted from being well-rounded to becoming purposeful, and from seeking quantity to valuing quality. High school students are encouraged to embark on a journey that authentically reflects their passions, fosters leadership, and prepares them for the challenges of the future.

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