Leisure Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rlst20

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To cite this article: Carmel Foley, Simon Darcy, Anja Hergesell, Barbara Almond, Matthew McDonald, Lan Thi Nguyen & Elizabeth Morgan-Brett (2023) Extracurricular activities, graduate attributes and serious leisure: competitive sport versus social-cultural clubs in campus life, Leisure Studies, 42:6, 971-988, DOI: 10.1080/02614367.2023.2168030

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2023.2168030

Published online: 15 Jan 2023.

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LEISURE STUDIES
2023, VOL. 42, NO. 6, 971–988
https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2023.2168030

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Extracurricular activities, graduate attributes and serious leisure: competitive sport versus social-cultural clubs in campus life

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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that students' participation in university-based extracurricular activities contributes to their graduate attributes such as leadership, teamwork, communication and resilience. However, it has yet to be determined which types of extracurricular activities are more impactful. This study inquired if participation in competitive sporting activities compared to social-cultural clubs have a greater impact on graduate attributes. Students attending a large metropolitan university in Sydney, Australia, who participated in extracurricular activities were surveyed ($n = 844$) with an instrument adapted to measure their degree of club engagement and questions on the skills, knowledge and experience they acquired. The findings indicate that engagement in competitive sport is more effective at contributing to graduate attributes when compared to social-cultural clubs. The study drew on the theories of serious leisure and leisure constraints to interpret this phenomenon. Participation in competitive sport was found to relate to more aspects of serious leisure such as study/work-life balance, stress reduction and skill development such as teamwork, time management and leadership skills. However, there are greater constraints to participating in competitive sport. The study concludes with implications for university administrators and recommendations for facilitating greater student opportunities to participate in all types of extracurricular activities.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 12 May 2022
Accepted 21 December 2022

KEYWORDS
Extracurricular activities; graduate attributes; leisure constraints; serious leisure; competitive sport; university

Introduction

Students who participate in extracurricular activities at university experience a range of benefits that complement their formal curriculum learning, chief among these are the enhancement of graduate attributes (e.g. Institute of Student Employers, 2018; Tchibozo, 2007) and, by extension, employability (e.g. Griffiths et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2013). University-based extracurricular activities represent one of the most diverse sets of leisure activities that any one institution can offer. From competitive sport to political clubs, social justice and faculty-based clubs and societies.

Graduate attributes are defined as 'the qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institution and, consequently, shape the contribution they are able to make to their profession and society' (Bowden et al., 2000, p. 1). A concept that is frequently allied with graduate attributes is *employability*, which is composed of three main elements: (1) the graduate obtaining a job, (2) the enhancement of student development by their higher education experience through both curricular and extracurricular activities, and (3) the possession of relevant achievements (Yorke, 2006).

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Extracurricular activities are defined in this study as 'academic or non-academic activities that are conducted under the auspices of the school (university) but occur outside of normal classroom time and are not part of the curriculum' (Bartkus et al., 2012, p. 698). At present, there are only a handful of studies that compare the different types of extracurricular activities on various criteria. One aspect of this phenomenon that has yet to be explored in detail is the links between extracurricular activities, the enhancement of graduate attributes and leisure. It is implicit that students participate in these activities during their 'leisure time', it is therefore surprising that relatively few studies have examined extracurricular activities as a leisure phenomenon. Leisure has been linked in many studies to an individual's well-being and higher education is a noted time of stress for students. We argue that the theories of serious leisure and leisure constraints in particular can provide a valuable interpretation of the link between extracurricular activities and graduate attributes.

The study employed a quantitative survey method; however, it was inductive in design, so it did not employ confirmatory mechanisms like hypotheses. Instead, the current study stemmed from research contracted by a not-for-profit campus life organisation responsible for delivering extracurricular activities, instrumental services and other events for a large Australian metropolitan university referred to in this study as CampusLife. Although focused on student life outside the classroom, CampusLife, in collaboration with academic staff (the authors of this paper), wanted to identify more specifically the range of graduate attribute-related outcomes that students experience by participating in extracurricular activities (Foley et al., 2019, 2022).

Upon completing the study and report writing process, the authors determined that serious leisure and leisure constraints could provide a useful means to interpret how extracurricular activities contribute to graduate attributes. The rationale for this was threefold. First, university-based extracurricular activities are a form of leisure, being neither work nor formal classroom study. Extracurricular activities are voluntary, intrinsic by nature as participation is for its own sake, and they provide a source of enjoyment and meaningful social interactions and relations (Veal et al., 2014). They are, in many ways, a form of leisure in the classical sense, providing self-reflection, learning and enjoyment (Jones & Symon, 2001). Second, the statistical analysis of the data collected in this study points to differences between competitive sport and social-cultural activities regarding their impact on graduate attributes, which serious leisure and leisure constraints can help us interpret and explain. Lastly, we realised that the survey data could drive insights into theoretical development, as opposed to testing theory as is normally the case (Bamberger & Ang, 2016).

Research indicates that extracurricular activities assist in developing numerous graduate attributes, including community engagement, informed inquiry, creativity and innovation, critical and independent thinking, judgement, cross-cultural understanding, spoken and written communication, understanding of the contexts of professional work, reflection on ethical issues and leadership, and the ability to work in a team (Griffiths et al., 2017; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2021; Jackson & Bridgstock 2021; Lau et al., 2014; Soria et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2013, 2013).

The article is divided into four sections. The first outlines the related literature on graduate attributes, a comparison of university-based competitive sport and social-cultural clubs and then an outline of serious leisure and leisure constraints. The second section outlines the research design and instrument, how it was administered to the students and how the results were analysed. The third section provides a description of the results most pertinent to the topic. The fourth and final section provides an interpretation of the results focusing on graduate attributes, serious leisure and leisure constraints, and offers a set of implications and conclusion.

Competitive sporting clubs versus social-cultural clubs

Definitions

For the purpose of comparison, extracurricular activities were divided into two main types, *competitive sport* and *social-cultural clubs*. Competitive sport includes 'the existence of structures

and organisation, the importance of competition', and formal rules; participants are required to 'adhere to the "rules of the game" being played' (Ryan et al., 2004, p. 477). Competitive sport involves regular engagement via competitions and training, team travel, varsity games, volunteering for fundraising, coaching and team bonding sessions.

Social-cultural clubs are defined in this study as associations dedicated to specific interests that members share with other like-minded individuals. The clubs include the broad spectrum of social, cultural and scholarly/faculty activities. Social-cultural clubs may include sport; however, it is mainly played between university club members, motivated by fun, fitness, health and social aspects, as opposed to formal competition. Table 1 outlines the two main types of extracurricular activities investigated in this study and some of the differences between them.

Competitive sporting clubs

The most significant study to date on the impact of competitive sport on employability and, by extension, graduate attributes was conducted by Griffiths et al. (2017). The authors employed a mixed-methods approach that included the administration of surveys, semi-structured interviews and secondary analysis with university graduates ($n = 5838$), employers ($n = 112$) and senior university executives ($n = 13$). The study notes that benefits can be derived from all forms of extracurricular activities, however, 'the potential difference with sport is that taking part has personal and physiological benefits which is different to that which might be derived from other pursuits, but which do not involve physical activity' (Griffiths et al., 2017, p. 448). Griffiths et al. (2017) raise an important question concerning the potential differences between participating in competitive sport and other types of extracurricular activities. The findings indicate that graduates, employers and university executives agreed on the positive impact of student participation in university competitive sport. Members who took on voluntary roles above and beyond those of competition, whether through club (e.g. club president, treasurer) or on-field leadership (team captaincy), were found to have developed additional graduate attributes.

de Prada Creo et al. (2020) found that 57% of students that participated in university-based competitive sport believed that it increased their leadership and interpersonal skills, compared to 20% of those who participated in arts- or music-related clubs. Muñoz-Bullón et al. (2017) investigated the academic performance of university students who participated in competitive sports with non-participants by comparing the grades of both cohorts. The results indicate that students who participated in competitive sport clubs scored higher average overall grades than those that did not. Roulin and Bangerter (2013) researched extracurricular activities, differentiating four types, namely individual sports (e.g. swimming), team sports (e.g. basketball), artistic activities (e.g. dancing) and students' associations or volunteering. The findings indicate that team sports led to greater acquisition of leadership skills when compared to arts-based and volunteering activities.

Table 1. Characteristics of competitive sporting club's v's social-cultural clubs.

Type	Competitive Sporting Clubs	Social-Cultural Clubs
Characteristics	• Competitive • Students voluntarily choose based on preference and interest • Social interactions • Play governed by formal rules • Formal coaching, focus on skill development and leadership is based on an assigned authority (e.g. Team Captain, Vice-Captain) • High levels of engagement and commitment required	• Non-competitive • Students voluntarily choose based on preference and interest • Social interactions • Social and cultural expression • Leadership and management are emergent and based on elections • Less engagement and commitment required, provide flexibility in the form of *opt in, opt out*

Social-cultural clubs

Lau et al. (2014) surveyed Taiwanese business school graduates evaluating how participation in extracurricular activities impacted on their employability skills. The authors categorised their participants based on the type of extracurricular clubs they were members of. These included: (a) student government (such as student councils), (b) service (such as scouts), (c) competitive sports, (d) music and (e) the arts. The authors found that 'different types of extracurricular activities could unequally influence the employability of graduating college students. Leadership skills benefited most from involvement in sports clubs, while creativity skills benefited most from involvement in music clubs' (Lau et al., 2014, p. 26).

Dickinson et al. (2020) employed a case study approach to test students' perceptions of the value of extracurricular activities. Students were recruited to become 'student researchers', carrying out a range of associated tasks. The students developed several transferable skills, such as teamwork and communication, and grew their professional networks. The students also rated the leisure benefits such as fun, enjoyment and making new friendships as important elements of the experience. Cotter et al. (2016) conducted several tests on students applying to an undergraduate program from high school to measure their degree of creativity. The authors found that students who were members of arts-based clubs (e.g. writing, music, acting) scored higher on tests of creativity than students who played competitive sports and other extracurricular activities.

Serious leisure

The idea of serious leisure grew out of R.A. Stebbins (1992) original thesis comparing and classifying amateurs (as well as hobbyists and volunteers) with professionals. Applied to the topic of this study, these ideas highlight a student's transition from a learning environment (the university) that could be classified as amateur to the paid workplace and becoming professional. Of relevance is R.A. Stebbins (1992) 'professional-amateur-public (PAP) system of relations' as it describes some aspects of engagement in university-based extracurricular clubs. R.A. Stebbins (1992) argues that amateurism needs to be considered a form of career building and that serious leisure activities be classified as 'near professional' (p. 18).

The serious leisure perspective 'synthesises three main forms of leisure, known as *serious leisure*, *casual leisure*, and *project-based leisure*' (R.A. Stebbins, 2007, p. 1). Serious leisure is defined as the 'systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist or volunteer activities sufficiently substantial, interesting and fulfilling for a participant to find a (leisure) career there acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience' (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014, p. 2). Six features characterise serious leisure: (1) the occasional need to persevere, (2) the ability to follow a (leisure) career in the pursuit of a specific interest, (3) significant personal effort, leading to the development of specialised skills, knowledge, or training, (4) the experience of durable benefits, including both personal and social benefits, (5) the experience of a unique ethos of common attitudes, values and practices through involvement in a unique social world and (6) strong identification with the pursuit (Gallant et al., 2017, pp. 439–440).

Casual leisure, on the other hand, is defined as an 'immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it' (Stebbins, 1997, p. 18). Project-based leisure 'is a short-term, moderately complicated, either one-shot or occasional, though infrequent, creative undertaking carried out in free time. It requires considerable planning, effort, and sometimes skill or knowledge, but for all that is neither serious leisure nor intended to develop into such' (R.A. Stebbins, 2007, p. 43).

Serious leisure has been applied to competitive sport (e.g. Bowness, 2020; Sivan et al., 2019) and social-cultural activities (a community arts-based project) (e.g. Darcy et al., 2022) finding that both experiences include elements of perseverance, a (leisure) career in the pursuit of the activities, the development of specialised skills/knowledge, and transition from leisure through casual payment

onto a professional career.Liu and Yu (2015) investigated the relationship between serious leisure, leisure satisfaction and subjective well-being in university students. The 'serious leisure participants ($n = 193$) were selected from seven arts groups in a key eastern Chinese university', which was compared with a contrasting cohort (n=225) enrolled but not committed to a serious leisure activity (Liu & Yu, 2015, p. 159). The serious leisure participants were members of the university's Art Troupe and the Symphony Orchestra. The results indicate that students who engage in these (serious leisure) activities had significantly higher overall leisure satisfaction and greater subjective well-being than their non-serious leisure counterparts.

Leisure constraints

While students gain numerous benefits from engaging in extracurricular activities, research has found there may also be associated costs. These include: the need for students to make changes to their academic timetables, not being able to take desired electives, the time devoted to extracurricular activities negatively impacting grades, missing lectures, seminars and tutorials, slower rates of progression and negative effects on wider social lives and paid work commitments (Thompson et al., 2013). One way to view these associated costs is from the perspective of leisure constraints, which are defined as 'those factors that limit people's participation in leisure activities, use of leisure services (e.g. parks and programmes), and satisfaction or enjoyment of current activities' (Scott et al., 2004, p. 75). The value in identifying the constraints and barriers students experience in accessing extracurricular activities is to 'improve delivery of leisure services, particularly among marginalised groups in the population' (Scott et al., 2004, p. 75).

Crawford et al. (1991) developed a hierarchical model of leisure constraints that includes: (1) interpersonal constraints such as personal factors and attitudes related to leisure preferences, (2) intrapersonal constraints related to interactions with other people, which is related to interpersonal compatibility and (3) coordination and structural constraints, which includes lack of time and money. Yankholmes and Lin (2012) study of university students in Ghana found that most would like to participate in extracurricular activities, seeing the benefits of these to their learning and enjoyment of university life. However, they did not participate due to a lack of time, money, and pressure from family and teachers to focus solely on academics. Dickinson et al. (2020) found that barriers related to time, economic pressures, cultural expectations and a lack of confidence affected students' engagement in extracurricular activities. Further research found that students 'find it challenging to balance extracurricular activities and their studies' and so not all 'stand to benefit equally from engagement in them' (Winstone et al., 2022, p. 1).

With this background of serious leisure and leisure constraints to assist in the analytical framework, we now outline the research design.

Method

Inductive quantitative research design

Faems (2020) has observed that quantitative data can be a 'viable source to induce theoretical insights' (p. 352). This is in line with Bamberger and Ang (2016), who argue that instead of offering a priori hypotheses to drive research, an inductive approach draws on 'the extant literature to review alternative options about the nature of the phenomenon or relationships that the study examines' (p. 4). Despite the prescriptive nature of closed question surveys, an inductive quantitative research design can be used to allow for new discoveries (Faems, 2020).

As outlined in the introduction, this project began as market research for CampusLife. During the process of identifying graduate attribute-related outcomes and the experience of student engagement that stems from participating in extracurricular activities, the authors found the theories of serious leisure and leisure constraints maybe useful for interpreting the differences

between competitive sport and social-cultural clubs in their contribution to graduate attributes. These theoretical insights emerged from analysis and interpretation of the data, despite not administering purpose specific scales for the concepts like the *Serious Leisure Inventory and Measurement Scale* (Gould et al., 2008) or the *Leisure Constraints Inventory* (Alexandris & Carroll, 1997).

Data collection instrument and participants

An online survey targeting students who engage in extracurricular activities was developed in August 2018. The survey was sent to CampusLife staff for feedback who piloted it among student board members and general university students prior to finalisation. Following the pilot minor changes were made to the language used to assist interpretation of questions for participants. For example, references to 'graduate attributes' were changed to 'skills for work'. The questionnaire covered three main topics:

(1) Involvement and engagement in extracurricular clubs: these questions measured the students' degree of involvement and engagement in their extracurricular clubs. We chose to measure student engagement because initial discussions indicated that extracurricular activities did not necessarily mean that a member attends club activities and events or is involved in other ways with the club. Involvement and engagement has been used in studies to measure employees' and university students' psychological connection to their work, study and extracurricular activities with higher levels associated with superior levels of commitment, performance and skill development (e.g. Griffiths et al., 2017; Gruman & Saks, 2011; Stuart et al., 2011). Questions were developed inquiring into the proportion of extracurricular activities that students attended and the responsibilities they assumed in running the club if any. The shortened version of the *Work and Well-Being Survey* by Schaufeli et al. (2006) was adapted by replacing reference to work with extracurricular activities. Schaufeli et al.'s (2006) survey measures work activities by focusing on three main dimensions: (1) vigour, (2) dedication and (3) absorption. Vigour is characterised by a willingness to invest energy into an activity and to persevere with it. Dedication refers to a strong involvement as well as experiencing enthusiasm and challenge. Absorption is 'characterised by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly' (Schaufeli et al., 2006, p. 702). Table 2 provides a sample of Schaufeli et al's., (2006) questions and how these were adapted for the present study:

(2) Benefits of extracurricular engagement: these questions were developed by reviewing the relevant literature analysing how involvement in extracurricular activities impacted on graduate attribute outcomes[1] (Foley et al., 2019), which students responded on a Likert scale. Table 3 provides a sample of the statements students were asked to respond to.

(3) Student information: these questions collected information on the participants gender, age, year of study, international or domestic student, undergraduate or postgraduate, name of degree and faculty they were studying in.

The survey was constructed and disseminated through the software program Qualtrics and ran from 12 September – 10 October 2018 with two reminders sent out. Prizes were used as incentives to attract participation and improve completion rates. The data collected online was checked for completion. All responses that answered at least the first question on their involvement in extracurricular clubs were included in the relevant analyses ($n = 844$). Among the sample, 538 students

Table 2. Sample questions adapted from the work and Well-Being Survey by Schaufeli et al., (2006).

Work and Well-Being Survey	Extracurricular Activities
• At my job, I feel strong and vigorous	• As a member of this club, I feel strong and vigorous
• My job inspires me	• My club inspires me
• I am immersed in my work	• I am immersed in my club

Table 3. Sample of benefits statements.

Please rate the benefits of club involvement
• Sense of belonging • Community contribution/positive difference • Teamwork skills • Self-esteem • CV enhancement • Professional competence

(64.5%) were members of social-cultural clubs, and 296 (35.5%) were members of competitive sporting clubs. Some students were found to be members of both. However, the survey asked the student to respond based on the activity that they were most involved in.

Analysis

The survey data was analysed using the software program Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Associations between categorical variables were analysed with contingency tables and assessed using Pearson's Chi-square. The suitability of the adapted engagement scale was examined using exploratory factor analysis. The one factor solution was the most satisfactory explaining 74% of the total variance. The adapted scale's reliability and validity were considered satisfactory – the Cronbach alpha was 0.955 and the respondents' scale results were strongly correlated with the frequency of attending club events and how students contributed to the club. Differences by level of engagement were examined with ANOVAS.

Ethics

The research was subject to the approval of the authors' university human research ethics committee. It was deemed low risk given the nature of the subject matter. Also, given that university students were involved as the focus of the research and the research team were made up of full time and casual academics from the same university, the research also required approval by the Pro-Vice Chancellor responsible for student academic experience. Participants were provided with an information sheet that included a written consent form, the information that their involvement was voluntary and confidential and they were able to withdraw at any time, and the contact details of the Chief Investigator and the University ethics research officer in case they had any concerns about the research. A link to the questionnaire was emailed to students by CampusLife so that the research team had no connection to the organisation database. This also allowed students to complete the questionnaire at a time and place that was convenient for them. There were no conflicts of interest issues with the students.

Findings

The findings section presents the results of the study through an examination of tables and figures identifying the sociodemographic characteristics of the group, membership duration, members level of engagement by club type, the benefits members receive, and the skills that they gain.

Table 4 reports that 81% of survey participants were domestic students. The 19% international/exchange students originated from various countries, with the majority coming from India, Germany, China and Indonesia. International students who participated in competitive sport clubs played Badminton, Kendo and Volleyball, while international students on exchange mostly played Handball and Football. Overall, 76% of the respondents participated in clubs as *members*, while 24% held management, leadership and/or administrative roles (e.g. Club Captain, Treasurer, President, Equipment Officer, Events and Fundraising Officers). Some 81% of domestic students indicated that English was their first language. These students made up the bulk of competitive sporting club members (89%), which was higher than the proportion among social-cultural club members (77%).

Figure 1 illustrates membership duration. There are differences in how long respondents were involved, with those participating in a competitive sporting club more likely to have been members for three years and more. Members of social-cultural clubs were more likely to have become involved more recently, *pointing to their opt in, opt out nature*.

Figure 2 illustrates that several differences were found between members of competitive sporting clubs and social-cultural clubs. The engagement scale measured members' club involvement. Competitive sporting club members were found to be significantly more engaged than social-cultural club members ($F(1) = 48.718$, $p < .001$). Students that participated in competitive sporting clubs were also found to attend more events (sporting events) than social-cultural club events ($X^2(4) = 61.693$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .372$). Competitive sporting clubs typically require greater engagement and regular attendance, such as relying on sport team members to be there for training, competition and fundraising. The higher level of engagement among competitive sporting club members is also reflected in the higher proportion of those members (51.4% compared to 32.7% of social-cultural club members) stating that they are involved with their clubs in additional ways ($X^2(1) = 15.623$, $p < .001$, ϕ=-.187). Examples of additional involvement include listings of specific events (e.g. ODay, Club Days, Game Days) or activities such as helping with event planning and promotion, fundraising, volunteering at events, inviting others to join the club or being a committee member.

Table 5 outlines the respondents' rankings of benefits between competitive sport and social-cultural clubs. While the differences are not significant based on the mean scores, these are, on average, higher for competitive sport club members, indicating that they perceive to have gained greater benefits. The differences can be seen in the number that ticked 'to a great extent'. This may partially be attributable to their higher levels of engagement, so that as engagement increases, so do the perceptions of benefits gained.

Table 6 illustrates the top skills that members of each type of club perceived they gained from participating in extracurricular activities. Competitive sport club members out-ranked social-cultural club members in teamwork, time management and leadership skills.

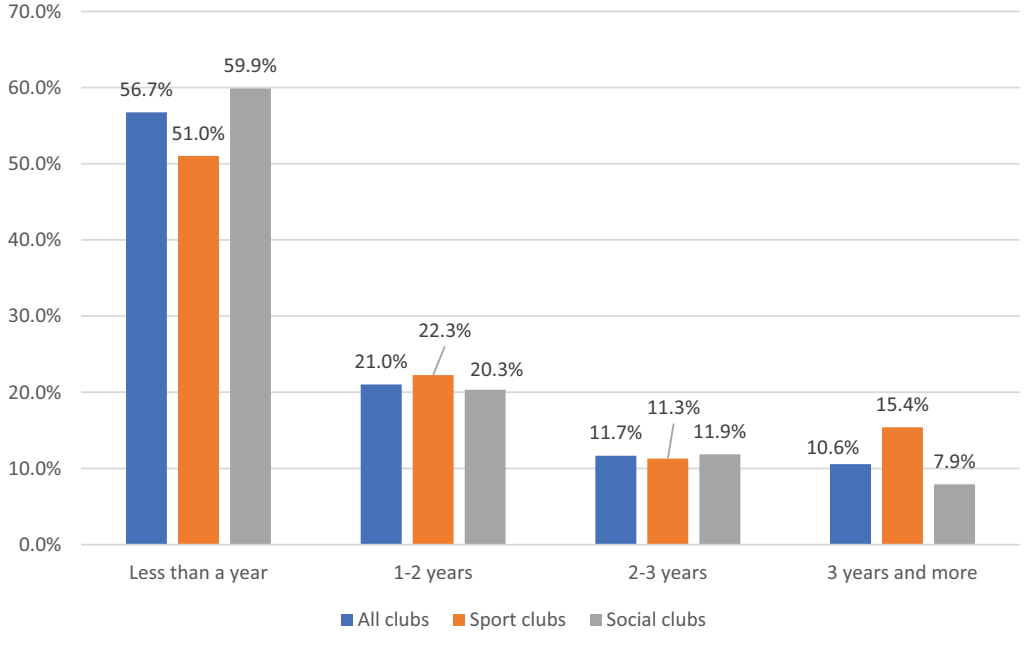

Figure 1. Proportion of respondents by duration of membership in extracurricular club.

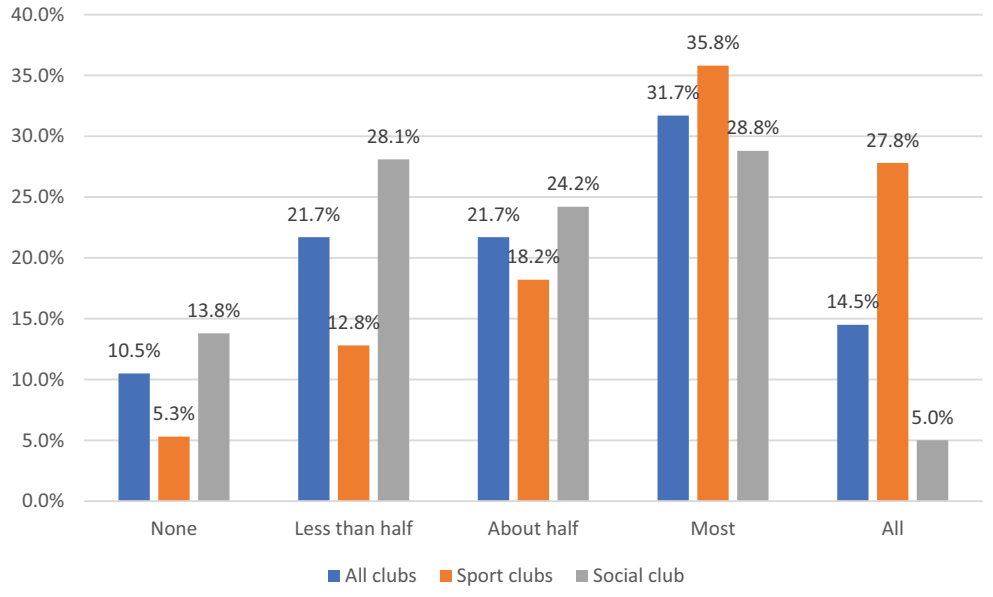

Figure 2. Member's level of club involvement by type of club and proportion of club events attended.

Discussion

Graduate attributes: skills, knowledge and experience

These results are in line with Griffiths et al. (2017), who compared competitive sport club members on a range of graduate attributes with students who are regular users of the university gym. 'Of the 11 skill areas, the 3 highest . . . having been developed through sport were all soft skills, including ability to work as part of a team, ability to lead/manage others, and organising, planning and coordinating' (Griffiths et al., 2017, p. 441). Roulin and Bangerter (2013) found that competitive sport club members acquired greater leadership skills, whereas social-cultural members were found to have developed greater organisational skills.

For both competitive sport and social-cultural club members, interpersonal, communication skills and teamwork skills were the most highly ranked based on the students' perceptions of their experiences. Thompson et al. (2013) study on the perceived impact of extracurricular activities on the employability of graduates, found they provide a powerful means by which to develop interpersonal skills. Third on the list of skills gained was creativity and time management, respectively, for social-cultural and competitive sport clubs. Lau et al. (2014) and Cotter et al. (2016) found that students who participated in competitive sports clubs benefited by developing greater leadership skills, whereas those involved in music, writing and acting clubs benefited by developing greater creativity skills. The following quote provides an interpretation as to why competitive sport is likely to foster greater teamwork and leadership skills:

> sport clubs typically maintain a consistent team throughout the competitive season and often out-of-season as well. This consistent, cohesive team structure creates opportunities for continual interaction and the development of interpersonal relationships. The frequency of organised participation (e.g. multiple times per week) enables members to interrelate and develop social skills through participation, interaction, and leadership opportunities. Sport clubs may have reported greater social perceived benefits based on the program's unique structure which fosters interaction and requires student leadership. *(Lower et al., 2013, p. 79)*

Table 4. Socio-demographic characteristics of students in extracurricular clubs.

	Overall	Social-Cultural Clubs	Competitive Sporting Clubs
Type of student			
Domestic	81%	82%	79%
International	13%	14%	10%
Exchange	6%	4%	11%
Type of club involvement			
Member	76%	69%	89%
Leadership role	22%	29%	10%
Former executive	2%	2%	1%
Level of study			
Undergraduate	89%	90%	88%
Postgraduate	11%	10%	12%
Mode of study			
Full-time	91%	91%	91%
Part-time	9%	9%	9%
Year of study			
1st year	36%	38%	32%
2nd year	30%	30%	30%
3rd year	23%	21%	26%
4th year and more	11%	11%	12%
Domestic students' language at home			
English	81%	77%	89%
Other	19%	23%	11%
Gender			
Female	53%	57%	44%
Male	46%	42%	55%
Non-binary/Prefer not to say	1%	1%	1%
Age			
Up to 18 years	14%	16%	10%
19 years	21%	21%	22%
20 years	21%	23%	18%
21 years	14%	13%	15%
22 years	10%	10%	11%
23 years	7%	6%	8%
24 years	3%	2%	5%
25–29 years	8%	7%	9%
30+ years	2%	2%	2%
Mean (SD)	21.0 (3.4)	20.8 (3.5)	21.3 (3.2)

Soria et al. (2013) found that students who held leadership positions in advocacy, political or service-based university clubs displayed greater engagement and commitment to social change than leaders of competitive sporting clubs.

Muñoz-Bullón et al. (2017) found that students who participated in competitive sport (compared to non-participants) achieved higher overall grades. However, Thompson et al. (2013) found that participation in extracurricular activities can also negatively affect academic performance. It is important to recognise that its effects are contextual though as they 'can be an employability booster if a good class of degree is unobtainable or a reinforcement of high academic achievement' (Thompson et al., 2013, p. 144). The current study did not investigate students' grades; instead, respondents were asked if extracurricular activities enhanced their academic skills, which club members of both types ranked lowly at #10. Further to Griffiths et al. (2017), we found that a greater number of competitive sport club members feel their participation in extracurricular activities helped them develop skills 'To a great extent' when compared to social-cultural club members (see Table 6).

Table 5. Benefits by type of club.

	Not at all	Very Little	Somewhat	To a Great Extent	Mean (SD)	Ranking
Personal enjoyment $p<.001$						
Sport club members	0.0%	1.6%	13.1%	85.3%	3.84 (.41)	**1**
Social club members	3.2%	4.5%	35.1%	57.2%	3.46 (.73)	**1**
Friendship $p<.001$						
Sport club members	0.8%	3.2%	21.0%	75.0%	3.70 (.57)	**2**
Social club members	6.2%	11.6%	28.0%	54.2%	3.30 (.91)	**2**
Sense of belonging $p<.001$						
Sport club members	1.6%	3.6%	27.4%	67.5%	3.61 (.64)	**3**
Social club members	5.4%	9.2%	37.5%	48.0%	3.28 (.84)	**3**
Improved self-esteem$p<.001$						
Sport club members	0.8%	4.8%	39.3%	55.2%	3.49 (.63)	**5**
Social club members	7.1%	17.0%	37.8%	38.2%	3.07 (.91)	**6**
Stress reduction $p<.001$						
Sport club members	0.8%	7.5%	26.6%	65.1%	3.56 (.67)	**4**
Social club members	7.7%	21.2%	42.6%	28.5%	2.92 (.90)	**9**
Network development $p<.01$						
Sport club members	2.8%	9.9%	37.3%	50.0%	3.35 (.77)	**7**
Social club members	6.9%	16.3%	35.8%	41.0%	3.11 (.92)	**4**
Community contribution/positive difference $p<.05$						
Sport club members	4.0%	14.3%	41.3%	40.5%	3.18 (.82)	**8**
Social club members	8.4%	15.6%	33.2%	42.8%	3.10 (.95)	**5**
Study/Work-life balance $p<.001$						
Sport club members	2.4%	7.9%	38.9%	50.8%	3.38 (.74)	**6**
Social club members	7.3%	17.8%	47.3%	27.6%	2.95 (.86)	**8**
Skills/experiences for work p=n.s.						
Sport club members	8.3%	19.4%	41.3%	31.0%	2.95 (.92)	**9**
Social club members	11.6%	15.2%	36.6%	36.6%	2.98 (.99)	**7**
Skills/experiences for studies p=n.s.						
Sport club members	8.3%	21.0%	41.7%	29.0%	2.91 (.91)	**10**
Social club members	12.0%	21.2%	36.4%	30.4%	2.85 (.99)	**10**
CV enhancement p=n.s.						
Sport club members	11.5%	29.0%	30.2%	29.4%	2.77 (1.0)	**11**
Social club members	17.8%	24.2%	29.1%	28.9%	2.69 (1.1)	**11**

Serious leisure

The theory of serious leisure is useful for interpreting and explaining how aspects of extracurricular activities contribute to graduate attributes and some of the differences in outcomes between competitive sport and social-cultural clubs. The results of the study are in line with several dimensions of the *Serious Leisure Inventory and Measurement Scale* (Gould et al., 2008) and Gallant's et al. (2017) six features of serious leisure. The results in Figure 2 indicate that respondents in competitive sporting clubs remain members for longer periods of time compared to social-cultural club members. Competitive sport requires high levels of specific skills and fitness that take time to develop, so participation can be measured through a series of stages: 'beginning, development, establishment, maintenance' (R.A. Stebbins, 2007, p. 20). A defining feature of serious leisure is that it involves 'significant personal effort, leading to the development of specialised skills, knowledge, or training' (Gallant et al., 2017, p. 439).

Nevertheless, some social-cultural clubs require the development of specialised skills over time. For example, mountaineering clubs that involve rock, snow and ice climbing, as well as backcountry skiing and snow camping in remote high mountains, require the development of high levels of fitness and specialised skills that take months and years to develop in much the same way as competitive sport. Yet, most social-cultural clubs do not require high levels of skill development or commitment to participate, offering instead enjoyment, social interactions and membership that is *opt in, opt out*.

Table 6. *Skill development of extracurricular members by type of club membership.*

	Not at all	Very Little	Somewhat	To a Great Extent	Mean (SD)	Ranking
Interpersonal and communication skills *p*<.001						
Social club members	3.6%	7.2%	51.1%	38.1%	3.24 (.74)	**1**
Sport club members	0.5%	5.3%	40.2%	54.1%	3.48 (.62)	**2**
Teamwork skills *p*<.001						
Social club members	5.0%	17.6%	44.6%	32.7%	3.05 (.84)	**2**
Sport club members	0.5%	3.3%	27.8%	68.4%	3.64 (.57)	**1**
Professional competence p=n.s.						
Social club members	8.3%	24.3%	44.2%	23.2%	2.82 (.88)	**4**
Sport club members	5.8%	19.7%	41.8%	32.7%	3.01 (.87)	**5**
Time management *p*<.001						
Social club members	8.3%	24.1%	49.3%	18.3%	2.78 (.84)	**5**
Sport club members	3.8%	8.1%	45.9%	42.1%	3.26 (.77)	**3**
Creativity/Ability to innovate p=n.s.						
Social club members	6.8%	18.3%	44.6%	30.2%	2.98 (.87)	**3**
Sport club members	11.1%	24.0%	40.4%	24.5%	2.78 (.94)	**6**
Leadership skills *p*<.001						
Social club members	13.4%	22.7%	43.7%	20.2%	2.71 (.94)	**6**
Sport club members	7.2%	12.9%	41.1%	38.8%	3.11 (.89)	**4**
Research skills p=n.s.						
Social club members	18.7%	34.5%	33.8%	12.9%	2.41 (.94)	**7**
Sport club members	25.8%	33.5%	27.3%	13.4%	2.28 (1.0)	**7**

Competitive sport club members rated 'study/work-life balance' (50.8%) and 'stress reduction' (65.1%) higher than social-cultural club members (27.6% and 28.5% respectively). Griffiths et al. (2017) observed that one of the benefits of competitive sport over other types of extracurricular activities is that it includes a physical activity component. The higher levels of stress reduction experienced by competitive sporting club members can be explained by the sustained physical activity involved, which has been found to reduce stress hormones in the body (adrenaline and cortisol) while stimulating those that are mood-enhancing (endorphins) (Wang et al., 2020). What also sets competitive sport apart from social-cultural clubs in this respect is that physical fitness and the development of sporting skills require perseverance.

Respondents from both club types were asked to rate the benefits they gained from participating in extracurricular activities, identifying 'personal enjoyment' (#1) and 'friendships' (#2) as the top perceived benefits. The students enjoyed meaningful social interactions and relations that occurred in a unique social world (Hartman et al., 2020; Veal et al., 2014). Secondly, engagement in both club types meets the serious leisure dimensions 'self-gratification' and enjoyment and 'group attraction' (Gould et al., 2008), along with 'self-enrichment, self-expression, [. . .] [and] pure fun' (R.A Stebbins et al., 2004, p. 453).

The results in Figure 2 also indicate that competitive sport club members are more *involved/engaged* in their activities both on and off the field, indicating greater opportunities for serious leisure experiences than members of social-cultural clubs. Competitive sport tends to be more immersive, and so the associated experiences resemble more of the serious leisure dimensions. These include 'career contingencies' related to events (e.g. team bonding, team travel) and defining moments (e.g. winning/losing important match, varsity games), which increase the participants sense of involvement (Gould et al., 2008). Greater involvement is also likely to lead to students experiencing a unique ethos in which they share 'common attitudes, values, and practices through involvement in a unique social world' (Gallant et al., 2017, p. 440; R.A. Stebbins, 2007, cited in). Social-cultural clubs are likely to have their own unique social worlds as well; however, the formalised characteristics of competitive sport are more likely to lend themselves to this aspect of serious leisure.

While serious leisure provides a useful means to compare the differences between competitive sport and social-cultural clubs, care needs to be taken in its application. Leisure experiences can be said to occur along a continuum between serious and casual leisure (e.g. Shen & Yarnal, 2010). Therefore, the degree to which an extracurricular activity is likely to function as a form of serious leisure may have less to do with the activity itself and more to do with the individuals' propensity to treat their participation as *serious* or otherwise. For example, a small proportion of competitive sport participants are also professional or semi-professional athletes in their chosen sport and may also hold sport scholarships for their academic course. Secondly, while extracurricular activities that function as serious leisure may have a greater impact on graduate attributes, students still gain benefit from extracurricular activities that would be deemed more casual (or casual leisure) in the form of social interactions, relaxation and enjoyment (e.g. Agans et al., 2022).

Leisure constraints

While there are many benefits and skills to be gained by participating in extracurricular activities, these are not without costs. There tend to be greater constraints when participating in competitive sport compared to social-cultural clubs. Our findings indicate that a higher percentage of domestic students are members of competitive sporting clubs (89%) and, for the majority, English is their first language compared to social-cultural club members (77%). Griffiths et al. (2017) employed Crawford et al. (1991) hierarchical model of leisure constraints to investigate the factors that motivated and constrained university students to participate in competitive sport. All students have intrapersonal constraints based on their own circumstances, abilities and perceptions of the pressure of academic and extracurricular activities. These intrapersonal constraints may have excluded some at university from participating as identified in the literature. Whereas for those who choose to participate, structural constraints are the major constraining elements such as having the time it takes to gain a high level of physical fitness for a particular sporting activity, gaining enough information, and acquiring the skills to a level that makes them proficient enough to be selected for a team that competes at the university level. The interpersonal encouragement of friends and others to participate in a competitive sporting activity was found to be highly motivating. Structural constraints include the time required for regular training, travel and competition. Financial pressures may arise through a combination of having sport scholarships for their academic course and/or those competing in a professional, semi-professional or representative arenas (e.g. students compete at university games with some going on to compete at Olympic, Paralympic and Commonwealth Games). Financial costs include purchasing specialised equipment, uniforms, travelling and registration fees. On the positive side, competitive sport is played according to fixed schedules in training and competition, which is likely to make it easier for members to plan their extracurricular activities around their formal classroom study.

CampusLife also provides formal support to sporting members representing the university and their outside sporting organisations to manage their competition commitments and academic workloads. These accommodations extend to assessment extensions of time, study support and the suspension of any in-person requirements to attend classes while attending a competition, which can make an important difference as students frequently struggle to balance their sporting commitments with their coursework (Winstone et al., 2022). Further, students who represent at regional, national or international level may also be eligible for scholarships. If they are professionally paid athletes, they may also be supported by study liaison staff within their professional sport organisations (Foley et al., 2022).

In addition to the existing research on the factors that constrain participation in extracurricular activities (Thompson et al., 2013), findings from the present study (Foley et al., 2019) indicate those for whom English is not their first language and international/exchange students are likely to face greater constraints when it comes to participating in competitive sport. 19% of the respondents were found to be international (13%) or exchange students (6%). These figures are at odds with the

number of international students that were studying in Australia (47%) prior to the Covid pandemic (for all higher education students in Australia in 2020) (Ferguson & Spinks, 2021). Cho and Price (2018) comparative study on the constraints that international students face in participating in intramural sport (compared to domestic students in the U.S.) yielded a similar set of results. These figures suggest that international/exchange student participation in extracurricular activities is low compared to their domestic counterparts. Walker et al. (2007) comparative study on leisure constraints of Canadian and Chinese students found the two cohorts experience different types of constraints. Chinese students were reported to be more intra- and interpersonally constrained, while Canadian students were more structurally constrained. International student numbers in Australia for example have almost doubled since 2010 making up half the total student enrolment (prior to Covid 19) (Ferguson & Spinks, 2021), however, they do not participate in extracurricular activities to the same degree and competitive sport even less.

Implications and conclusion

University-based extracurricular activities encompass key aspects of leisure. Universities are typically thought of as places reserved for academic and professional endeavours; however, CampusLife affords opportunities for leisure through personal learning and growth, where students attain a range of skills that can be applied to all domains of life (Hartman et al., 2020). Serious leisure and leisure constraints, though not considered when framing the study, provide valuable insights into the role of extracurricular activities in developing graduate attributes. As the findings and discussion have shown, serious leisure and leisure constraints provide a valuable interpretation into the nature of engagement in university-based leisure time activities, the importance for student work-life balance, stress reduction and their preparation for employability and being professionals of the future.

The findings clearly identified those groups that were underrepresented in the CampusLife sport and social/cultural extracurricular activities (e.g international students and those from other language than English backgrounds). It is recommended that CampusLife undertake a concerted strategy to engage international students as an extension of university pastoral care towards this group. This will assist in to ways: (1) ensuring that international students are introduced to the benefits of extracurricular activities for their well-being with orientation programs emphasising the importance of having a leisure study balance and (2) the recognition of extracurricular in creating a 'sense of belonging' for these students to the University and their Australian cultural experience. Alumni programs have shown that international students who feel a sense of belonging to university and country create life long opportunities for renewing their engagement with the country throughout their life course.

Other implications for CampusLife include the 'credit recognition' for those students who take on managerial leadership roles (President, Treasurer, Events Coordinator, Quatermaster, board member etc.) within all types of extracurricular clubs. To better support those taking on these roles, micro-credentialing of short courses as part of their onboarding experience could also be considered. Both of these implications of recognising extracurricular activities have been foreshadowed in the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (Martinez-Marroquin & Male, 2021).

The present study continues to further our knowledge of extracurricular activities, providing administrators with an understanding of similarities and differences, and how they contribute to university goals. Competitive sport and social/cultural club participation provide a differing set of benefits, skill development (leading to employability and graduate attributes) and constraints, although these differences are often modest depending on the variable being measured. Future studies could further these findings by testing for differences between types of sports, for example, individual versus team sports and competitive versus non-competitive (social) sports. Moreover, future research could examine student engagement in extracurricular activity portfolios to test for differences in benefits by a combination of activities.

The research identified various types of intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural constraints that might impact the extent to which students, especially marginalised groups, participate in extracurricular activities. For example, international students were identified as having lower rates of participation in all club activities due to time and money that were related to cultural expectations that all their time would be spent studying. Future studies could examine selected marginalised groups and experiment with interventions to determine ways that can increase the likelihood of extracurricular engagement by those groups.

Lastly, Thompson et al. (2013) argue that the way in which students engage with extracurricular activities plays a more important role in determining the benefits and skills they can gain than the choice of the activity itself. Nevertheless, access to and participation in extracurricular activities are also affected by socioeconomic, political and institutional factors. The findings in the current study indicate that students from multicultural backgrounds (those who speak a language other than English at home) and international/exchange students are less likely to participate in competitive sport, compared to their local counterparts. Given the numerous benefits of competitive sport, university administrators need to look at ways to make these activities accessible for more diverse groups of participants. These may include providing financial grants (for equipment, travel, extra training) for under-represented students who are interested.

Limitations

The research design aimed to assess the benefits of engagement in extracurricular activities through self-reports. Self-reporting has been criticised because of its potential to produce biased information due to social desirability, memory distortions and other factors impacting the reliability of the data (Veal & Darcy, 2014). While we acknowledge this limitation, we assume that the bias is randomly distributed in the overall data collected for this study. The research instrument also limited the investigation to club respondents that were most involved in extra-curricular activities. We assumed that higher levels of involvement would more likely produce greater benefits. However, we acknowledge that involvement in other clubs or a combination of clubs may provide more benefits.

The current research was also limited in several ways due to the sampling. While the sample size ($n = 844$) was sufficiently big enough to examine differences between competitive sports and social/cultural clubs, the sample did not allow for comparisons between individual competitive sports. The composition of the sample also did not allow for meaningful comparisons between competitive and social sports, or by selected demographics such as undergraduate versus postgraduate responses, which could have extended the insights gained. However, while recognised as limitations the data has provided insights into the research questions posed by the project. Finally, we note that accurate recording of the frequency of club and society engagement would have improved the study.

Note

1. The *benefits* literature used to inform the benefits statements in the survey included the following, enhanced leadership and teamwork skills (de Prada Creo et al., 2020; Griffiths et al., 2017), community contribution (Díaz-Iso et al., 2019), employability (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2021; Thompson et al., 2013) academic performance (Muñoz-Bullón et al., 2017) and wellbeing (Wang et al., 2020; Winstone et al., 2022).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The work was supported by the ActivateUTS .

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