

9.3 Campus Groups

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe several benefits of participating in campus life by joining organized groups and participating in campus activities.
2. Identify how participation in organized activities can promote multiculturalism and a better understanding of diversity.
3. List several ways you can learn about groups and activities on your own campus.

The college social experience also includes organized campus groups and activities. Participating in organized activities requires taking some initiative—you can't be passive and expect these opportunities to come knocking on your door—but is well worthwhile for fully enriching college interactions. The active pursuit of a stimulating life on campus offers many benefits:

- **Organized groups and activities speed your transition into your new life.** New students can be overwhelmed by their studies and every aspect of a new life, and they may be slow to build a new life. Rather than waiting for it to come along on its own, you can immediately begin broadening your social contacts and experiences by joining groups that share your interests.
- **Organized groups and activities help you experience a much greater variety of social life than you might otherwise.** New students often tend to interact more with other students their own age and with similar backgrounds—this is just natural. But if you simply go with the flow and don't actively reach out, you are much less likely to meet and interact with others from the broader campus diversity: students who are older and may have a perspective you may otherwise miss, upper-level students who have much to share from their years on campus, and students of diverse heritage or culture with whom you might otherwise be slow to interact.
- **Organized groups and activities help you gain new skills, whether technical, physical, intellectual, or social.** Such skills may find their way into your résumé when you next seek a job or your application for a scholarship or other future educational opportunity. Employers and others like to see well-rounded students with a range of proficiencies and experiences.
- **Organized groups and activities are fun and a great way to stay healthy and relieve stress.** As [Chapter 10 "Taking Control of Your Health"](#) discusses, exercise and physical activity are essential for health and well-being, and many organized activities offer a good way to keep moving.

Participating in Groups and Activities

College campuses offer a wide range of clubs, organizations, and other activities open to all students. College administrators view this as a significant benefit and work to promote student involvement in such groups. When you made your decision to attend your college, you likely received printed materials or studied the college's Web site and saw many opportunities. But you may have been so busy attending to academic matters that you haven't thought of these groups since. It's a good time now to check out the possibilities:

- Browse the college Web site, where you're likely to find links to pages for student clubs and organizations.
- Watch for club fairs, open houses, and similar activities on campus. Especially near the beginning of the year, an activity fair may include tables set up by many groups to provide students with information. Talk with the representatives from any group in which you may be interested.
- Look for notices on bulletin boards around campus. Student groups really do want new students to join, so they usually try to post information where you can find it.
- Stop by the appropriate college office, such as the student affairs or student activities office or cultural center.
- If you are looking for a group with very specialized interests, check with the academic offices of departments where many students with that interest may be majoring.
- Consider a wide variety of types of organizations. Some are primarily social; some are political or activist; some are based on hobbies (photography, chess, equestrianism, bird watching, videogaming, computer programming); some involve the arts (instrumental music, choral singing, painting, poetry writing, drama club); some are forms of physical recreation (rock-climbing, ballroom dancing, archery, yoga, table tennis, tai chi, team sports); some focus on volunteerism (tutoring other students, community service projects, food drives); and others are related to academic or intellectual pursuits (nursing club, math club, chess club, engineering club, debate club, student literary magazine).
- Consider other forms of involvement and roles beyond clubs. Gain leadership experience by running for office in student government or applying for a residence hall support position. If you are looking for a job, consider what kinds of people you'll have the opportunity to interact with. [Chapter 11 "Taking Control of Your Finances"](#) will give you more tips for finding a job.
- If your campus doesn't have a group focused on a particular activity you enjoy yourself, think about starting a new club. Your college will help you get started; talk with the student activities or affairs office.

Whatever your interests, don't be shy about checking out a club or organization. Take chances and explore. Attending a meeting or gathering is not a commitment—you're just going the first time to see what it's like, and you have no obligation to join. Keep an open mind as you meet and observe other students in the group, especially if you don't feel at first like you fit in: remember that part of the benefit of the experience is to meet others who are not necessarily just like everyone you already know.

EXERCISE: EXPLORE YOUR INTERESTS FOR COLLEGE CLUBS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Write things you may be interested in doing with others in each of these categories.

Clubs Related to Hobbies and Personal Interests	Sports, Exercise, Physical Fitness	Interests Related to Your Major Area of Study	Purely for Fun

Bridging the Generation Gap

Is there still a “generation gap” in our society? Maybe not in the same sense as when that phrase came into being in the 1960s, but it remains generally true that most people naturally gravitate toward others of similar age. Even in the open, accepting environment of most colleges, many students interact primarily with others of similar age—which, sadly, misses a great opportunity for both older and younger students to learn from each other.

Younger, “traditional” students just out of high school usually live in residence halls and immediately meet other students of the same age. New students who are just a few years older, who usually have spent some time in the workforce before returning to their education, are more likely to live in a house or apartment and probably spend less time on campus interacting with other students. Some students may be decades older than both traditional and most untraditional students, returning to college sometimes with the desire to change careers or simply to take classes of special interest; their lives may be so well settled in other respects that they have little interest at all in the social world of college. Students in all of these groups may be slow to initiate interactions with each other.

This is one of the great benefits of organized campus groups and activities, however. Regardless of your age or background, you can attend a meeting of those with similar interests and have the opportunity to meet people you simply would not have crossed paths with otherwise. Age barriers rapidly break down when people share the same interests.

When and How to Say No

For all the benefits of an active social and campus life, too much of any good thing can also cause trouble. If you join too many groups, or if you have limited time because of work and family commitments, you may spend less time with your studies—with negative results. Here are some guidelines for finding a good balance between social life and everything else you need to do:

- Don’t join too many organizations or clubs. Most advisors suggest that two or three regular activities are the maximum that most students can handle.
- Work on your time management skills, as described in [Chapter 2 "Staying Motivated](#).

Organized, and On Track". Plan ahead for study time when you don't have schedule conflicts. If you have a rich social life, study in the library or places where you won't be tempted by additional social interaction with a roommate, family member, or others passing by.

- Don't be afraid to say no. You may be active in a club and have plenty of time for routine activities, but someone may ask you to spend extra time organizing an upcoming event just when you have a major paper deadline coming up. Sometimes you have to remember the main reason you're in college and just say you can't do it because you have to get your work done.
- If you really can't resolve your time conflicts, seek help. Talk with your advisor or a college counselor. They'll help you get back on track.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- College students with an active social life and who interact with the campus community are generally more successful academically as well.
- Organized groups and activities promote a more varied and diverse social experience.
- Students participating in organized groups and activities gain skills that may become important for job and other professional applications.
- Most campuses offer a large variety of opportunities for involvement in clubs, associations, and other activities.
- Take the initiative to find organizations and activities you will most enjoy.
- To balance your social life and academic studies, avoid joining too many organizations and use your time management skills.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. List two specific skills (technical, intellectual, or social) that you personally may gain or improve by participating in a campus club or organization.

2. What events or campus groups have you noticed on a campus bulletin board or poster recently that caught your eye?

3. What academic subject might you major in? Imagine yourself joining a club formed by students in that major. What kinds of things might you do or talk about in such a club? (Use your imagination as you consider how you can have fun with others in such a club.)
