

Class: ELSP 715 Understanding Research in Education

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Date: 5/7

**Title:** The Impact of student involvement in campus activities and student organizations on students' academic success, persistence, and retention in higher education

### **Abstract**

Student Involvement in campus activities and student organizations has been associated with positive educational outcomes. Astin's student involvement theory, and Tinto's students' departure theory emphasized on the student's involvement and its positive impact on college persistence, and retention in higher education. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of students' involvement in campus activities and students' organization on students' academic success, persistence, and retention in higher education. The relevance of this study lies in understanding how involvement in campus activities and student organizations contributes to students' academic success, persistence, and retention in higher education. By utilizing relevant research findings, this study explores different types of campus activities that have the most significant impact on students' success. Using a mixed-method approach, this research will combine quantitative data from institutional record and student survey with qualitative data that will be gathered through focus groups interview. The research findings aim to offer valuable insights to inform faculty, and students affairs professional to not only enhance students' engagement programs, but also to improve students' persistence, and retention in higher education.

### **Introduction**

#### *Context*

Students' participation in campus activities and organizations plays a critical role in shaping their personal development, academic success, and overall college experiences. Research has shown that participation in student organizations can lead to the development of social and leadership skills, higher retention rates, heightened self-confidence, improved satisfaction with college, the ability to see course curriculum as more relevant, and further success after college. According to Tinto's student departure theory (Tinto's, 1993), students who attended campus activities and organizations may feel more connected to their campus community, which in result they are more likely to persist and complete their degree.

Institutions strive to develop programs to provide students with an opportunity to get involved in campus activities, connect with peers, and build their networks. Student organizations are one of the examples where students have an opportunity to attend activities, connect with other students, and develop their leadership skills. In addition, involvement in organizations provides a venue, in which students can experience peer interaction, learning from each other, and networking opportunities. One benefit of student involvement in campus activities and student organization is leadership and identity development of students (Harber Curan Pierre, 2023). Additionally, many factors described by Astin that contribute to students' college outcomes, such as living on campus, joining fraternity and sorority, extracurricular activities, attending sports teams, enrolling in an honor program, and working part-time on campus. Furthermore, there is a correlation between student involvement and college persistence. For instance, according to Tinto (1975), students who are well integrated into the academic and

social system of college and campus environment may feel attached to the institutions and are more likely to persist.

Another way students become involved in campus life is through college service learning. According to Roberts & McNeese (2010), Service learning improves students' grades and enables them to apply course knowledge to real-world experience and situations. For example, students who actively attend in service learning as a main part of their coursework developed relationships with their peers and felt more integrated with their programs and academic communities. Research findings suggest that involvement in different diverse experiences positively affects students' learning. An example of those types of experiences are being involved in racial-cultural awareness workshops, recreational activities, and socializing with different ethnic groups on campus, in which students will develop strong friendships with students from different cultures.

One of the most interesting environmental factors that affect retention is holding a part-time job on campus (Astin, 1984). Students who are spending more time working on campus will get the opportunity to interact with other students, professors, and staff; therefore, students will feel attached to the institutions. For example, women and students of color are more likely to associate gains in practical competence to work experience than were White students (Hernandez et al., 1999). Another factor that influences students' persistence and retention in higher education is types of colleges. Students are more likely to persist at religious colleges when their own religious backgrounds are similar. For example, Black students are more likely to persist at Black college than White colleges (Jaggers, 2021). On the other hand, community colleges are places where the involvement for both faculty and staff are limited mainly because most faculties are part-time, and students are commuters (Astin, 1984).

Campus climate also plays a crucial role in shaping the overall experiences of college students, sense of belonging, and persistence. Research has shown that students' success and sense of belonging was directly influenced by different aspects of campus climate including feelings of being cared for, valued, and supported (Wells & Hone, 2015). For example, a study focusing on Asian American students at a predominantly White institution found that the belief of campus climate were strong factors on the sense of belonging of these groups of students (Wells & Hone, 2015). Similarly, according to the research findings, Native American students have experienced feelings of disconnectedness from campus community, social isolation, and loneliness due to racism, microaggressions, and lack of Native-Centered campus resources (Tachine, et al., 2017). Besides, 14% of low-income students reported that validation was strongly associated with their feeling of belonging during their college (Kitchen, 2023).

### *Need*

Despite the long list of benefits, there is an assumption that student organizations distract students from educational activities, thus resulting in lower academic performance. Regardless of the belief, research on the exact impact of such involvement presents inconsistencies. Researchers also argue that the time students commit to extracurricular activities will ultimately distract from academic work which can negatively affect academic performance. Unfortunately, this belief may discourage students from becoming involved in campus activities, leading to a missed opportunity to receive the various other benefits of belonging to an organization. I believe there is still a significant gap in understanding the underlying mechanisms and the moderating factors that may affect these outcomes, as well as there is insufficient research on types of campus activities that influences student's academic success and college persistence. Additionally, colleges and

universities face increasing pressure to improve graduation rates and foster an inclusive campus climate; it is essential to identify and implement strategies that meaningfully enhance student outcomes. This study will address this gap by exploring the relationship between student involvement and academic success indicators. Findings from this research will provide valuable insights for higher education administrators and student affairs professionals looking to strengthen student support services and design involvement opportunities that contribute to retention and degree completion.

**Purpose:** The goals and/or hypotheses of the research

The goal of this study is to investigate the impacts of student's involvement in campus activities and organizations on students' academic success, persistence, and retention in higher education. While prior research has shown that engagement in campus life can support student development and belonging, there is limited empirical evidence directly linking involvement to measurable academic outcomes and long-term persistence. For this purpose, my research hypothesis is that student involvement in campus activities and student organizations is positively associated with improved academic performance (GPA), stronger persistence (continued enrollment), and increased retention and graduation rates. In this context, the key construct of the study is student involvement, which is defined as the degree and type of participation in campus activities, leadership roles, and membership in student organizations. By examining the connection between this construct and critical academic outcomes, this research looks to decide whether increased involvement serves as a meaningful predictor of student success and outcomes.

### **Data and Method**

The targeted students' populations in this study consists of individuals with varying levels of involvement in campus organizations and extracurricular activities. This population is relevant to the research hypothesis because it provides insight into how student engagement influences academic success, persistence, and retention in higher education. I would use a stratified random sampling approach to ensure that the sample is representative of all the students' population. To examine the impact of student involvement in campus activities and student organization on students' success, persistence, and retention in higher education. I would use a mixed method approach.

Survey questions will be designed to measure involvement frequency, GPA, and self-assessed personal growth, while qualitative interviews will capture in-depth experiences and beliefs. In addition, surveys will find how students feel about their college experience before, during, and after participation in student organizations. It will also help me understand how engagement in campus activities influences their sense of belonging. In addition, a semi-structured interview will be conducted with a purposive sample of students representing various levels of involvement and diverse backgrounds.

These interviews will help me understand the students' motivations for joining these organization, their personal experiences on how their involvement shaped their academic and social experiences, and challenges or barriers faced during involvement and persistence in higher education. To measure student success, persistence, and retention, I would analyze student's GPA record and collect data through event attendance records, leadership roles held, and self-reported participation. This quantitative data will enable me to measure to test the core hypothesis including that higher levels of involvement are positively associated with academic success and persistence.

## **Conclusion**

Student involvement in campus activities and students' organizations not only influences students' success, but it also has a positive impact on college persistence, and retention in higher education. Drawing from theories such as Astin's theory of involvement and Tinto's student departure theory, this study aims to explore the connection between student engagement and critical academic outcomes, including success, persistence, and retention. Using a mixed-method approach that integrates surveys, institutional data, and qualitative interviews, this research will offer a comprehensive analysis of how various types and levels of involvement may positively influence students' educational journeys. This study has multiple implications for practice for those who work with students including faculty, and student affairs professionals. The research findings will also help the colleges direct students towards involvement opportunities and how to structure programs that help students. For instance, one common practice will be for campuses to offer an involvement fair that allows students organizations to hire members from diverse backgrounds. In addition, institutions should be able to address not only students' academic needs, but also other factors that shape their motivation to persist. These factors are included in a student's self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and sense of purpose.

## **Limitations and Future Suggestions**

Limitations include the cross-sectional nature of the data, potential self-report bias, and limited generalizability across institutions. Future research should consider longitudinal studies and diverse institutional contexts to capture the long-term effects of student involvement specifically on college persistence, and retention in higher education.

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