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Whitewater, Wisconsin  
Graduate School

Female Student Involvement: A Review and Handbook Development

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements of the  
Master of Science in Education – Professional Development

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December 4, 2012

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the student affairs professionals that I interviewed and surveyed for this project. My advisor, Dr. Mason, and my capstone course professors, Dr. Shaw and Dr. Hohenshell provided valuable feedback and support during this process. I would also like to thank my family for all the encouragement they gave me.

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## Abstract

This study explored the relationship between female student involvement in extra-curricular activities and academic achievement. Female students who are involved in extra-curricular activities appear to perform better academically than non-involved female students and involved male students. This information learned from literature led to the handbook development. The handbook contains ways to promote female student involvement. Student affairs professionals working with student involvement at seven Midwestern United States universities were interviewed about their current practices to promote student involvement. Surveys were also collected from five other Midwestern universities. The information gathered from the interviews was used to create the handbook. Two themes emerged from the interviews and surveys. Posters are still the number one source that students cite as how they found out about involvement events. Universities are modifying their leadership programs to be more flexible to work with students' schedules.

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of my capstone project was to apply information learned from literature to develop a handbook to promote female student involvement. As a future student affairs professional, I am interested in finding out what contributes to a student's success. There are many factors related to a student's success and those factors will vary from student to student. One thing that I believe will help a student's chance for success is involvement in extracurricular activities. Foubert and Grainger (2006) surveyed students at one public university and found a statistically significant positive relationship between involvement and development.

Prior to the handbook development, I collected and reviewed research on college student involvement and academic success, to develop an understanding of the connection between a student's academic success and their involvement in extracurricular activities. There are many types of student involvement, but I focused on research that specified what type of activity the student is participating in outside of the classroom. These activities might include athletics, Greek life, community service, or other organizations. The majority of the research I reviewed included differences between male and female students. Overall female students showed a greater level of academic success when involved in extracurricular activities. My project is focused on female student involvement because the literature shows involvement impacts female students more than male students.

The literature I reviewed shows that involvement has a positive relation to academic success. Anderson (1988) suggests that female students who are highly involved will maintain their goals related to college and attainment. Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, and Banaji (2004) surveyed student athletes and found that female student athletes performed better academically

than the male student athletes did. Pascarella, Flowers, and Whitt (2001) surveyed students involved in Greek organizations. The female students they studied showed some positive gains in understanding science, writing skills, and thinking skills. These studies led me to want to find ways to encourage female student involvement in extra-curricular activities and I compiled that information into a handbook. In the summer and fall of 2012, I talked with staff members at 12 different universities to see what they are doing to encourage female students to get involved in extra-curricular activities. I interviewed seven senior staff members at seven different Midwestern universities. In addition to this I sent out survey questions to 30 Student Activities Directors at multiple universities around the Midwest and received five completed surveys, additional attempts to receive more responses were unsuccessful.

After compiling the responses from the personnel at different universities, I created a handbook for staff members working with student activities or leadership at universities to use when trying to increase female student involvement. In this handbook I also included marketing research on targeting females. Ford (1983) produced a guide for creating academic advising handbooks that I used to facilitate my handbook. This guide influenced my format and helped me decide what to include in the handbook.

After creating a draft of the handbook in November 2012, I asked two student affairs professionals to evaluate the handbook. I provided them with a list of questions to focus their feedback on certain aspects of the handbook. The feedback provided by these two people was used to update the handbook. Both evaluators indicated the need for more information specific to female students. As a result, I added more information to the handbook regarding female students. One evaluator suggested adding pictures and student quotes to make the handbook more appealing. This could be added in the future to be used at a specific university.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

Student success is a vital part of college. Colleges exist to produce graduates that will succeed in their field. What makes a student successful and how can student success be supported? The research in this chapter indicates there is some relation between student success and being involved in extra-curricular activities. Students can get involved in internships, athletics, community service, leadership programs, Greek organizations, and groups with specific focus areas. This review includes literature on student activities and their relation to student success. Some areas of student life appear to help students succeed and others may hinder a student's success. The research covers three basic areas: adjustment to college, specific groups, and minority students.

#### **Adjustment to College**

First year college students have to adjust to a new environment. This adjustment is vital to students succeeding in their courses. Student organizations are one way of helping students adjust to college life. There are student activities that are set up to help first year students adjust to college and new students can also benefit from joining other organizations. The research suggests students who join student organizations or participate in student activities during their first year have a better chance at succeeding in the adjustment from high school to college.

Foubert and Grainger (2006) surveyed students at one public university at the beginning of their first year, beginning of their sophomore year, and the end of their senior year. The study focused on development as a measure of adjustment and success. Foubert and Grainger's survey showed a statistically significant relationship between involvement and development. Their definition of development consisted of several categories including education involvement,

academic autonomy, establishing and clarifying purpose, career planning, lifestyle planning, lifestyle management, and cultural participation. The involved students reported higher developmental scores than the uninvolved students. In addition, the students who actually joined or led student organizations tended to report higher levels of development than the students who reported just attending a meeting. Students who actively participated gained more from the organizations. Students who only attended one meeting did not gain the benefits of involvement. Students need to be more active in the organization to benefit the most from involvement.

There was a similar study done by Tieu et al. (2010). They studied involvement and university adjustment. This study had first year students from five universities in Canada fill out a questionnaire in November and March of their first year in college. According to their research, students who participated in a highly structured activity had a smoother transition from high school to college. A highly structured activity is one that consists of set events and set activities. The results of this study indicated that student involvement in any extra-curricular activity is not directly related to positive results, but instead the type of activity matters.

Another type of activity that helps students adjust is a learning community. Chundur and Zieleniewski (2009) discussed the experience of a learning community focused on the holistic development of information technology students. This learning community shows how a student organization can work with the academic program to increase student success at a two-year campus. The organization had game parties, held an Information Technology Clinic for other students during orientation, arranged presentations from community members related to technology, and held programming contests. This is an example of a highly structured organization. A structured activity has specific events to participate in and rules to follow. A

highly structured activity has more events related to the main focus of the group. For example, a chemistry club might conduct scientific experiments.

Anderson (1988) studied male and female students and their success in college. Anderson's study examined multiple factors including social-economic status. This study suggests socioeconomic status may play a role in whether a student is involved with extracurricular activities. Students with a low socioeconomic status attending an elite college may be less likely to get involved and be integrated to the institution. Anderson suggested that "highly involved students are far more likely to maintain or increase their goal commitment and to achieve those high goals" (p. 175). Anderson also discussed goal commitment and the difference between genders as she found that "women's goal commitment is also more closely linked both to college contexts and to attainment, while men's goals seem more resistant to social influence and less important as determinants of attainment" (p. 175). These findings suggest that female students who are highly involved will maintain their goals related to college and attainment.

A survey by Powers in 2008 asked 103 undergraduate students questions about their academic achievement, social involvement, and life satisfaction. This survey used students from Clemson University and had about equal numbers of freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Powers found that both academic achievement and social involvement contribute to life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is an important factor for college students because high life satisfaction has a positive correlation with higher graduation rates. The results were not broken down among class levels.

Jackson, Miller, Frew, Gilbreath, and Dillman (2011) examined group identification and involvement by surveying 542 students at a university. They found that students who identified

with their college were more likely to get involved. Results from the survey showed a statistically significant positive correlation between campus identification and involvement. These results suggest students that identify with their campus are more likely to be involved. Students that scored positive in campus identification on the survey were likely to list their university as part of their personal identity.

### **Model for Student Organizations**

Hajart, Toscano, Horsley, and Del Re (2007) presented a model for success that student organizations should try to follow. This model is one that can help student organizations to become more structured and more helpful to students. There are four main components to the model which are cohesion, organization, resourcefulness, and energy. Cohesion refers to communication. Communication helps student members to stay informed of the events they can benefit from. Organization in this model refers to setting goals for the group. Organization gives the student group some much needed structure. Resourcefulness is important for developing and practicing professionalism and finding guest speakers. It also helps with fundraising for activities or finding additional sources of funding for activities. The last part of the model is energy. Energy has a lot to do with motivation and persistence. If the students in the organization are not motivated, then they won't actively seek the best experience and help the organization grow to help more students. This model should be used to encourage student success.

The next section of literature reviews specific types of student organizations and explains the role that structure might have in helping students succeed, or in hindering their academic achievement. Structure can be achieved using the model described above. The specific activities discussed are academic, Greek, athletics, and religious organizations.

## **Type of Organization**

This section reviews literature concerning specific types of student organizations and explains the role that structure might have in helping students succeed, or in hindering their academic achievement. Structure can be achieved using the model described above. The specific activities discussed are academic, athletics, Greek, and religious organizations.

**Academic.** Holzweiss, Rahn, and Wickline (2007) compared academic and non-academic organizations. Academic organizations consist of groups that are related to a specific field of study. They conducted this survey of undergraduate students at a large, public university. They surveyed the students on involvement in student organizations and the motivation behind joining an organization. The survey results suggested that students who joined academic organizations tended to have a future orientation. A future orientation refers to thinking ahead and planning for the future. Those students also thought the organization was helpful to them in terms of study groups and being beneficial toward their future career. The survey results suggested that students who joined a non-academic organization tended to have a present-orientation and were more focused on the college experience and developing as a leader. A present-orientation refers to only thinking about the current situation and not looking to the future. The results of this study imply that students who join academic organizations are looking toward their future and that future benefits from the involvement in an academic organization.

One study that focused on academic organizations studied psychology organizations. Strapp and Farr (2010) surveyed graduating psychology majors about involvement, satisfaction, and GPA. They found that the students who were more involved with the psychology activities had higher grades and higher levels of satisfaction with their degree programs. While the findings suggest that the psychology related activities were beneficial to students, the authors did

not report information as to why some students became involved, while others did not. The study design was very specific; the authors did not explore other activities, nor did they investigate participation by students from other majors for comparison. The students were all psychology majors and involvement was only measured for participation in psychology related activities. This is a limitation because it does not explore other organizations that may be influencing the students.

While Strapp and Farr (2010) studied student activities with students who were a part of the psychology program, Renzi, Sauberan, Brazeau, and Brazeau (2008) studied the leadership development of students entering into the pharmacy program. This study was done to determine if student leadership activities should be used as an admissions criterion for pharmacy students. The authors explored the role that student organizations play in a student's success after college. In this study, they found approximately 30% of the students surveyed had taken on a leadership role. There is some concern that the remaining students did not gain the leadership experience needed in the work force after college. One strategy to increase involvement that they suggested is to have a period of time set aside for students to meet, as student time is a valuable commodity. In the end, the authors did not find concrete data that student leadership activities should be used as an admissions criterion, as there were too many variables.

The academic organizations discussed above are structured around the academic program. Academic organizations can also be structured as learning communities. Stassen (2003) studied living-learning community models and academic performance outcomes. Living-learning communities are groups of students that are linked by courses, content, interest group, or theme. Stassen studied students in three learning communities at a Research I university. Each of the three groups showed a significant difference in first semester grade point average when

compared to students who were not a part of a learning community at the same university.

Learning community students may all live in the same residence hall or live separately.

Wang, Arboleda, Shelley II, and Whalen (2004) looked at the role living in a residence hall plays in academic success. Living in a residence hall is an unstructured extracurricular activity and the results of the survey show the type of community in the residence hall matters. In this study Wang et al. reports results for female students and male students separately. Wang et al. (2004) found that female students that preferred a quiet living environment had better GPAs. This shows a residence hall focused on being an academic study environment may be more beneficial than one focused on being a social environment.

Academic-focused organizations seem to have a positive relationship to academic success. Not all student organizations have an academic component and their correlation with academic success varies from activity to activity. One such type of group is athletics.

**Athletics.** Maloney (1993) studied student athletes at Clemson University. Maloney looked at data for one academic year for students and student athletes. Maloney noticed the students who participated in athletics did worse in their classes than students who did not participate in athletics. Maloney's study also showed that the athletes performed worse academically during the season for their respective sport than during the off-season. This shows that not all involvement is beneficial to academic success at every school. Adler and Adler (1985) also found a negative relation between male students' athletics and academic success. Adler and Adler conducted a four year study of a major college men's basketball program. One author worked with the team during those four years and played a participant role and the second author played the observer role. They also interviewed the coaches and players of the basketball program over those four years. The student athletes showed a declining interest in academics. In

the first year the students had optimism related to academics, but as time went on the students started to lose interest in their academics.

Maloney (1993) also found that women athletes had a better GPA compared to non-athletes and that athletics did not seem to play a negative role in their academic achievement. This provokes the thought that gender might also play a role in how extra-curricular activities influence academic achievement. Student athletes at highly selective universities were studied by Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, and Banaji (2004). They compared the academic achievement of student athletes to the academic achievement of non-athletes that had the same academic credentials when entering college. This study found a relationship between gender and academic success. The female student athletes performed significantly better than the male student athletes did. Athletics is not the only activity that has a mixed relationship with academic success. Greek organizations also have varying impacts among females and males.

**Greek.** Pascarella, Flowers, and Whitt (2001) studied specifically Greek affiliations. A prior study conducted by Pascarella et al. (1996) showed a negative correlation between Greek affiliation and students' cognitive development during the first year of college. The second study followed the same group of students during their second and third years of college. This study found there were still negative effects among the men in a Greek organization but to a lesser degree. The women involved showed some positive gains in understanding science, writing skills, and thinking skills. Similar to the study by Maloney (1993) on athletics, Greek activities appear to have a negative relation to student academic achievement for men and it appears that gender plays a role in whether involvement is helpful to a student's academics. As with Maloney's study, this one is limited to one university. This might mean that Greek or athletic activities might influence students differently at other universities. Another group that

has the same limitations is religious organizations. All studies were only conducted at a single university.

**Religious organizations.** Religious organizations encourage students to get involved. There is an inconsistency among the research about the influence on students' academic performance. Donahoo and Caffey (2010) studied the impact involvement in religious activities has on college students by surveying African American undergraduate students. They found the students who were involved with religious activities had an average grade point average of 3.4092; they did not survey students who were un-involved. Donahoo and Caffey also asked the students to explain the impact religion has on their college career. Overall Donahoo and Caffey found "these students attributed their successful transitions into college, academic performance, career selection, ability to cope with stress, and desire to accept and improve the lives of others to their church involvement, religious practice, and spirituality" (p. 100).

Another study that investigated religious involvement and academic success was conducted at Marist College. This study by Schubmehl, Cubbellotti, and Ornum (2009) surveyed college student involved with the Campus Ministry. The results of the survey show there may be a relationship between high spirituality and high involvement. This means that students who are highly involved with the ministry tend to be highly spiritual. The survey did not find a significant relationship with involvement with the campus ministry and grade point average, so even though students may be highly involved in the ministry, it does not significantly increase their grade point average.

Additional studies have examined factors related to minority students' involvement. The following paragraphs are summaries of two studies about minority student involvement and academic achievement.

## **Minority Students**

Guiffrida (2004) conducted a qualitative study of 84 African American students at a predominately White institution. Data was collected using face-to-face interviews and small focus groups. Guiffrida compiled the information gathered and looked for patterns or themes after the interviews. This study reported some differences between the involved students with high grade point averages (GPA) and the involved students with low GPAs. The students with lower GPAs tended to cite the organizations as taking time away from academics. These students were happy to be in the student organizations, but felt that they had to choose how to spend their time. The students with higher GPAs who were involved the same amount as those with low GPAs cited being involved in student organizations as an asset to their experience. Overall the study showed that student motivation for joining an organization might play a role in their academic success more than the organization itself. This is similar to Holzweiss, Rahn, and Wickline's (2007) study results where students with a future orientation were more likely to participate in student activities.

Another study on under-represented students and involvement included Latino and African American students. Baker (2008) studied the academic performance of African American and Latino students across 27 different colleges. This study had a wider variety of colleges included in the sample than most of the other articles on this topic. Baker used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen. Baker found that the amount of time spent on an extra-curricular activity did not significantly influence academic achievement. However, the type of activity did significantly influence academic achievement. Political organizations had a positive relation to academic achievement for both African American and Latino students. Arts organizations had a positive relation to academic achievement for African American students.

Baker (2008) suggested “the benefits of involvement in a political organization may be related to the increased level of self-esteem and self-efficacy” (p. 290).

Baker’s study is focused on minority students, but it seems to have the same results as Holzweiss, Rahn, and Wickline’s study, mentioned earlier in this review, on academic and non-academic activities. Both studies seem to imply that the type of organization is important to student achievement.

### **Female Students**

Sander (2012) explored the gender gap in student engagement. She explained that female students are generally more involved, as “women are volunteering in the community, spending more time each week preparing for class, and caring for dependents; male students, meanwhile, spend more time relaxing and playing intramural sports” (para. 18). This suggests that female students may naturally be more inclined to join student organizations.

Female students seem to benefit more from student involvement than male students. A study by Ullah and Wilson (2007) found relationships with peers had a positive effect on female students’ academic achievement and a negative effect on male students’ academic achievement. Peer relationships can be formed through student involvement.

Consistent with Ullah and Wilson (2007), other studies looked at the differences between female and male students. Anderson (1988), Aries et al. (2004), and Maloney (1993) all found a positive correlation between female student involvement and success in college. While these three studies varied in the type of organization studied, they have similar results. Female students seem to benefit more from being involved in student activities than their male counterparts.

## **Literature Summary**

There have been multiple studies done about student involvement and student success. The research suggests that more structured and academically focused extra-curricular activities are closely related to improving student success (Hajart et al., 2007; Stassen, 2003; Wang et al., 2004). Non-structured and non-academic extra-curricular activities show little relation to student success and in some cases show signs of being a negative influence on student achievement.

One major limitation of the current review of research is there appears to be a lack of true experimental research. This means there is no cause and effect relationship between involvement and academic achievement. A researcher cannot control for outside influence when looking at student involvement and therefore cannot conduct a true experiment. Most of the current research is correlational. Repeating the studies at numerous colleges would increase the support for the results of studies like the ones in this literature review.

This research is focused on the impact of student involvement. Overall, student involvement seems to have a positive relationship with academic achievement. In some organizations like athletics and Greek organizations, female students tend to show a positive relationship with academic achievement and males show either no relationship or a negative relationship with academic achievement. For this reason, there is a need to figure out ways to get female students involved in student activities.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Handbook Development**

The purpose of my capstone project is to apply knowledge of relationships established from the literature in Chapter 2 to develop a handbook to help promote female student involvement. The review of literature shows the importance of extracurricular involvement for female college students. These activities play a role in the success of students academically. After putting together the review of literature and finding that involvement does promote academic success, I was left with the question “how can colleges get female students involved in extracurricular activities?” I decided to interview experts in college student involvement and combine that information with marketing research to create a handbook for encouraging female students to get involved in extracurricular activities. This handbook can be found in Appendix A.

#### **Method of Handbook Development**

I developed a handbook for university staff members who are looking for ways to get female students more involved on campus. I looked at research on marketing to females. I interviewed seven senior staff members at seven different four-year public Midwestern universities. In addition to this I sent out a Survey Questionnaire to Student Activities Directors at 30 universities and through a listserv of University Directors of Women’s Centers. I targeted universities in the Midwestern part of the country.

In the summer of 2012 I conducted two initial in-person interviews. After those two interviews, I was interested in finding out information from more universities. I sent out requests for information through email to 30 institutions in August of 2012. I focused these emails around the Midwestern part of the country so they would all have a common thread. The questions I used to gain information are listed in Appendix B. After receiving five survey responses, I found

the survey response rate was low (17 %), thus, I interviewed five more staff members during the fall of 2012 for a total of seven interviews. In an attempt to gather more information, I resent the email surveys in October 2012 and followed up with phone calls in November and December 2012, but received no additional information. I then created a handbook. The handbook I created consists of three major sections; background information, interview results, and marketing information.

**Background information.** The first section of the Handbook includes a brief background of information on student involvement from the research I did that is provided in the review of literature. This information makes up a short introductory section explaining the purpose of the handbook. I decided to include this to set the tone for the handbook and for staff members working with student involvement to read to see if the handbook is relevant to their university and their role at the university. This information explains why and how they should try to get more female students involved on campus.

**Interview results.** The second section of the Handbook includes my interview and survey findings. In this section I describe activities the responding universities are doing to increase involvement and what they feel is working best. There are example events to get students interested in getting involved, ways to advertise those events, and tips for using social media.

**Marketing information.** The third section of the Handbook includes marketing ideas for flyers, events, and other strategies found through researching marketing strategies. The combination of information, interview results, and marketing tips form a picture of how to promote female student involvement at universities.

## **Participants**

The handbook utilizes information from seven interviews and five surveys received from student affairs professionals. All participants were currently working with student involvement at four-year public universities in the Midwestern United States.

## **Marketing Research**

Five of seven professionals interviewed are not doing anything to target female students specifically. In order to gain information on how to target female students, I researched marketing techniques. Borow (2010) created a list of ideas to remember when marketing to females with social media. The suggestions included: Don't post just to post. Make sure there is a reason behind any post. Also, make sure any event or organization page has the needed information. This includes time, date, location, and a little about the event. Create an emotional connection, and provide a space for the students to talk about what they want out of the organization or event.

## **Survey Instrument**

I sent out five questions to 30 institutions and institutions on a listserv of Directors of Women's Centers. The questions were in the body of an email instead of an attachment. The questions are available in Appendix B.

## **Interview Instrument**

I conducted two initial interviews in the summer of 2012 and five additional interview in the fall of 2012. The first two interviews were face-to-face and the following five were conducted over the phone. I used a conversational format with questions expanded from the survey questions. There is a list of questions used for the interviews available in Appendix C.

## **Handbook Evaluation Instrument**

After gathering all the information from the seven interviews, five surveys, and marketing research, I created a handbook draft. This draft was sent to two of the student affairs professionals that were interviewed. Along with the handbook draft I sent an attachment with questions to focus the feedback. I asked questions concerning the content of the handbook and questions about format. This handbook evaluation instrument is available in Appendix D.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Results**

The results of my capstone project are showcased in my handbook which can be found in Appendix A.

#### **Survey and Interview Results**

The response rate to my email surveys was very low. I sent my survey out to 30 administrators individually and to a listserv of Women's Center Directors. Out of all the possible responses, I only received five replies. Attempts made to gain additional responses were unsuccessful. I resent the email survey and followed up with phone calls. My results are based on those five replies and the seven interviews I conducted.

The results of this project suggest the best way to get female students involved is through posters placed around campus and in residence halls. Five of the seven people interviewed said they received the most response to their posters. Another theme that showed up in the interview results is the use of social media. Social media like Twitter and Facebook are being used to advertise campus events and student organization meetings. Even though social media is being embraced by more students and departments, posters appear to be seen by more students. The other two people interviewed said they received the best attendance through word of mouth. Female students are more likely to attend an event if someone they know is attending that event. This means that universities should encourage students that are already involved to bring friends to events.

One respondent reported in the interview that their annual Women's Leadership Conference used to be one of their best events, but in recent years the attendance has been dropping. The conference was usually held on a Friday and Saturday. Due to low attendance, it

was decided to try something new. Now the conference is broken up into once-a-week sessions called the REAL women series which stands for Research, Educator, Activist, and Leader.

Another respondent explained that their leadership program is broken up into different components and students are able to choose which events they attend. As long as they attend a certain number of events, they will complete the leadership program. This is a more flexible way to set up a leadership program compared to a traditional weekend-long program.

Another respondent said the greatest challenge she faced advertising events for the Women's Center was meeting students where they are. Some female students may be scared away by the word "feminist". She suggested female student groups should focus on what they do and the content of their group when advertising and not focus on words that can scare away new students. Only two of the seven interview respondents target female students specifically and none of the survey respondents target female students.

When asked which events have the best attendance, all respondents indicated their involvement or volunteer fair had the best attendance. Seven respondents indicated that student organizations had more student interest at volunteer or involvement fairs when the students were actively involved and reaching out to other students. The organization tables that had students sitting down and not talking receive little attention from the new students.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion and Limitations**

I recommend this handbook be used by staff members at universities. The information contained can be a helpful guide to increase female student involvement. As the handbook suggests, word of mouth may be the best strategy to use. Word of mouth is where students talk with other students about organizations or events. There is still research to be done in this area of university life. There is no definitive best way to increase female student involvement, only suggestions of ways that might help.

### **Conclusions**

The research suggests a positive relationship with female student involvement and academic achievement. That research is the reasoning behind my handbook development. The overall themes from my interviews and surveys refer to events and advertising. The events that are most common to get students involved are organization fairs, campus wide entertainment, and leadership programs. Five of the seven professionals interviewed indicated that posters are still the number one advertising source that students cite as the way they found out about an event. This may change in the near future with social media just starting to be utilized by student involvement offices.

### **Modifications**

The majority of student affairs professionals surveyed and interviewed indicated that they are not currently targeting female students. This means it is hard to study what is getting the female students involved. Future projects regarding female student involvement might benefit from interviews with female students, as the students would be able to indicate what first got them involved.

## **Limitations**

Studies involving students are difficult and face many limitations. As discussed by Foubert and Grainger (2006), there can be no true scientific experiment regarding student involvement and academic success. To do a true scientific experiment, researchers would need to identify two groups of incoming students. One group would need to get involved in some extracurricular activity while the second group would not be allowed to do so. This experiment would not be fair to either group of students, especially if the researchers find that not being involved can have a negative correlation with academics. To do this, the study would need to examine the factor of involvement through a quasi-experimental design in which group membership is already set, for example, comparing involved seniors to uninvolved seniors. Also, there would be no way for the researchers to control for outside influences. A student's academic success can be influenced by outside forces. Their success could be negatively impacted by illness or tragedy. Their success could be positively impacted by a good professor or close friend encouraging them. These outside factors make it difficult to find out for sure the extent of an impact student involvement has on academic success.

A limitation of this particular project is the scope. I focused my search for information on colleges in the Midwestern part of the country. There could be colleges in the eastern or western parts of the country that are excelling at female student involvement and I missed that information by not interviewing someone from there. The scope is also a limitation because I received surveys from five schools out of 30 surveys sent out. Those responses combined with my in-person interviews left me with information from 12 different universities. I recommend that future studies explore the activities being done at more colleges and perhaps colleges from other parts of the country.

Ten of the twelve student affairs professionals that I gathered information from are not currently doing anything to specifically target female students. This limits the information I included in my handbook as most of it is based on targeting students in general and not just female students.

### **Recommendations**

I suggest anyone working with student involvement should review this handbook and compare it with their current methods encouraging involvement. They can gain new ideas, or have their ideas reinforced by the information provided. Universities can adapt the handbook for their use by including information about events specific to their campus. They can include pictures from those events and quotes from students. Also, I encourage university staff members to talk with staff at other universities. Universities can benefit from collaboration with each other.

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# **FEMALE STUDENT INVOLVEMENT HANDBOOK**

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## **Background Information**

The purpose of this handbook is show ways to promote female students involvement in extra-curricular activities at universities. Information in this handbook was collected through surveys and interviews with student affairs professionals at universities in the Midwestern United States. Also included in this handbook are marketing techniques from research based on targeting females in advertisements.

Student success is a vital part of college. Colleges exist to produce graduates that will succeed in their field. What makes a student successful and how can student success be supported? The research collected for this handbook indicates there is some relation between student success and being involved in extra-curricular activities. Students can get involved in internships, athletics, community service, leadership programs, and many more. Foubert and Grainger (2006) surveyed students at one public university at the beginning of their first year, beginning of their sophomore year, and the end of their senior year. The study focused on development as a measure of adjustment and success. Foubert and Grainger's survey results showed a statistically significant relationship between involvement and development.

Involvement refers to participating in student organizations or activities outside of the classroom. Powers (2008) found that both academic achievement and social involvement contribute to life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is an important factor for college students because high life satisfaction is linked with higher graduation rates. Anderson (1988) found "women's goal commitment is also more closely linked both to college contexts and to attainment, while men's goals seem more resistant to social influence and less important as determinants of attainment" (p. 175). These findings suggest that female students who are highly involved will maintain their goals related to college and attainment.

## **The CORE Model for Student Organizations**

Conyne (1983) developed the CORE model for student organization development. This model is one that can help student organizations to become more structured and more helpful to students. At the center of the CORE model are four main components which are cohesion, organization, resourcefulness, and energy.

### Main Components

- Cohesion- Cohesion refers to communication. Communication helps student members to stay informed of the events they can benefit from.
- Organization- Organization in this model refers to setting goals for the group. Organization gives the student group some much needed structure.
- Resourcefulness- Resourcefulness is important for gaining professionalism and finding guest speakers. It also helps with fundraising for activities or finding additional sources of funding.
- Energy- Energy has a lot to do with motivation and persistence. If the students in the organization are not motivated, then they won't actively seek the best experience and help the organization grow to help more students.

## **Events to Promote Involvement**

- Volunteer-Involvement Fairs
  - Have students at the fair to promote the organizations. Students relate better to other students.
  - Students need to show their excitement for their organization.
  - Some universities hold their involvement fair outside to create a fun environment.
  - Consider having a DJ or free pizza.
  - Interactive booths/tables seem to attract more student attention. Students can win prizes, or play mini-games.
  - One agriculture organization actually brought in a mini-tractor to emphasize their group.
- Campus Wide Entertainment
  - This can include movies, concerts, comedians, or speakers.
  - These events draw people across campus and across demographics.
- Leadership Retreats/Programs
  - These events help students become better leaders. They also encourage attendees to get involved in other organizations after the retreat.
  - These can happen on one weekend or be spread out throughout the semester.
  - Weekend attendance is low on campuses where students leave on the weekends.
  - Leadership Programs that are spread out during the semester can be more convenient for students.
    - i. Students can pick which workshops or speakers they want to attend.

- ii. Students must attend a certain number of events to finish the program.
  - iii. Some universities include a community service hour requirement as part of their leadership program.
- Alternative Spring Break
  - Students travel during spring break to a designated place to perform service projects.
  - Some include a learning portion where in the weeks prior to the trip, students learn about the group they will be helping.
- Sorority Recruitment Week
  - This targets female students specifically.
  - Pascarella, Flowers, and Whitt (2001) found that female students involved with a sorority in their second and third years of college showed some positive gains in understanding science, writing skills, and thinking skills.
  - Female students that attend recruitment events but do not join a sorority may still learn about the benefits of getting involved.

## Ways to Advertise Events

- Posters
  - About 71% of interviewees reported most students say they learned about an event from posters.
  - Posters can be placed in residence halls, on tables in dining halls, academic buildings, and student unions.
  - Electronic posting boards are also an option.
  - Make sure to include the “What, When, Where, and Why”.
  - Some universities have success utilizing humor in their posters. This encourages students to read posters, because they do not want to miss the joke.
- Word of Mouth
  - Word of mouth is the best way to get more female students involved. Female students are more likely to attend an event if someone they know is going.
  - Utilize your student employees. They can invite their friends to events. Those friends will in turn invite more friends creating a ripple effect.
  - Create T-Shirts with event information and have students wear around campus prior to an event.
- Social Media
  - Twitter- Twitter is a good way to keep students in touch with an organization or department. Twitter can be used to post meeting information and relevant information.
  - Facebook- Facebook is good for more in depth communication. Emails can be passed over, but most students utilize Facebook. Facebook has multiple tools an

organization can use, such as events and group pages. Facebook allows students to see who else is involved and can find out if their friends will be there.

- New Student Orientation
  - This is a good opportunity to introduce the Student Involvement Center or Office to incoming students. They can learn what the office does and how it can benefit them when they arrive on campus.
- Professors
  - Professors can advertise guest speakers that relate to their class. Some professors require attendance of guest speakers or art performances. They might also offer extra credit. These events can be a stepping stone to get students involved.

## **Social Media Suggestions**

Social media is a newer way to advertise events. Many universities are just starting to utilize websites such as Facebook and Twitter to connect with students. While posters are still the main way students find out about events, social media is growing and has potential to becoming the new main source of information for students.

- Contests
  - Offer prizes and have the students come into the office to pick up the prize. This is a great way to get students into the student involvement center.
  - Photo Hunt- Students must figure out where on campus a picture was taken.
  - Trivia- Students answer trivia questions about the campus, office, or upcoming events.
- Photos
  - Post photos after events so students can see what happened at the event and what to expect at future events.
  - Bands, speakers, and comedians are good opportunities to take pictures during setup to post as a reminder.
- Reminders
  - Start advertising three weeks before an event
  - Post one hour to half an hour before an event. Many students do not make plans until the night of an event.

## **Marketing Tips to Target Female Students**

- Using Facebook- Borow (2010) created a list of ideas to remember when marketing to females on Facebook. Below are the ideas from that list that are relevant to marketing events to female students.
  - Quality Counts- Don't post just to post. Make sure there is a reason behind any post. Also, make sure any event or organization page has the needed information. This includes time, date, location, and a little about the event.
  - Create an Emotional Connection- Find a way to get the female students connected to the organization.
  - Provide Utility- This is related to quality. Posts that don't provide useful information can be seen as spam.
  - Give Fans a Voice- Provide a space for the students to talk about what they want out of the organization or event. Allow them to give feedback after the event also.
- Using Twitter
  - Follow the same suggestions as provided for Facebook.
  - With Twitter, an organization can post smaller bits of information. If the organization is a political group, they could utilize Twitter to post updates on upcoming elections. If the organization members like sports, they can post scores and statistics.

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## Appendix B: Email Survey Questions

1. What is your role at your college/university?
2. Do you target female students to get involved? If so, how?
3. What events does your department coordinate?
4. How do you advertise those events
5. Which events had the best attendance?

## Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What is your role at your college/university?
2. Do you target female students to get involved? If so, how?
3. What events does your department coordinate?
4. How do you advertise those events?
  - a. Have you received feedback from students about the advertisements?
  - b. Have you heard students referring to a Facebook page or certain poster?
5. Which events had the best attendance?
6. How do you utilize social media?
  - a. Which sites?
  - b. How often do you post?
  - c. Do students reply/interact on site?
7. Think about your student organization fair, are there any techniques that stand out, anything unusual to get students attention?

#### Appendix D: Handbook Evaluation

1. Does the “Background Information” clearly explain the purpose of the handbook?
2. What information needs to be expanded?
3. What information is unnecessary?
4. Is there any topic you feel should be added to the handbook?
5. How do you feel about the format of the handbook?