

Smart teens rub off on teammates: Study shows why extra-curricular activities matter

September 17 2014



(Phys.org) —A new study of high school activities bears this message for incoming high school students: Play what the smart kids play.

Joining an extra-curricular team or [club](#) with members that get good grades can double a high school student's odds of going to college.

And Brigham Young University sociologist and study co-author Lance Erickson knows how to sell the study to teens.

"Tell your parents, whatever they ground you from, it shouldn't be from practice or a club activity," said Erickson. "If they ground you from a school club, you are more likely to end up living at their house because you won't be going to college."

Erickson spent four years constructing a dataset and statistical model that could answer critics' arguments. The sample includes 90,000 [high school students](#) and up to 10 of their friends. Since friends often join a team or club together, the model subtracts out the positive influence of friends who are also teammates. That isolates the impact of teammates who aren't otherwise in a student's social circle.

To the surprise of the researchers, the type of team or club didn't really matter. It simply came down to being around high-achieving peers (as measured by GPA). So in one school that might be the swim team or the orchestra, while at another school it's the computer science club or cross country.

"Typically you think the benefits of participating come from the type of club or the intensity of the skills you learned there," said Ben Gibbs, the lead study author. "I think we're the first to show that who you are hanging out with in those activities really matters."

The study is forthcoming in *Social Science Research*, which posted an accepted version of the report. As noted in the study, simply participating in any extracurricular activity increased a student's chances of [college enrollment](#) regardless of that team's average GPA. In addition, the odds of college enrollment double for a student if they join a group with an average GPA that is 1 point higher – i.e. one with a 3.6 GPA rather than a team with a 2.6 GPA.

The role of teammates is an added piece of a puzzle that co-author Mikaela Dufur started in 2007. That's when she published research showing that playing high school sports increased women's chances of getting a college degree.

She notes that providing extra-curricular activities can be especially critical in schools that serve low-income students. And the earlier the start, the better.

"I would encourage middle schools and junior high schools to devote resources to those kinds of things so that as they transition to [high school](#), they are prepared to join a team," Dufur said.

More information: Benjamin G Gibbs, Lance D Erickson, Mikaela J Dufur, Aaron Miles, "Extracurricular associations and college enrollment," *Social Science Research*, Available online 6 September 2014, ISSN 0049-089X, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2014.08.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2014.08.013).

Provided by Brigham Young University

Citation: Smart teens rub off on teammates: Study shows why extra-curricular activities matter (2014, September 17) retrieved 22 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-09-smart-teens-teammates-extra-curricular.html>

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