

Getting Experience

Some of the most significant and practical experiences during your college years involve your life outside the classroom. They provide opportunities for relating with others, learning about your abilities and interests, developing your skills, and contributing your talents.

College activities provide opportunities for exploring your career options and getting some "hands-on" experience. Through volunteer, campus, and internship experiences, you can reinforce your interest in a career field or realize that a certain field may not be for you after all.

Campus Involvement

The benefits of participating in campus activities are numerous. You can make new friends, learn new skills, and even develop your resume. These experiences are also significant when you seek post-graduation employment opportunities.

Employers want evidence of achievement (the ability to set and accomplish goals) and leadership (the ability to establish a climate when people are motivated toward achieving goals). They offer the following advice regarding involvement in campus activities.

- Get involved! Don't just pay dues and attend the annual banquet. Employers want to know about the positions you hold, responsibilities you assume, goals you accomplish, and skills you develop through your participation.
- Join a professional organization. Activities often include guest speakers who provide insight into a career, visits to employer sites, and participation in professional meetings or conferences. They also provide opportunities to strengthen your professional skills and confirm that you have made an appropriate career choice.
- Use social organizations to develop your interpersonal, social, communication, and leadership skills. Offer to contribute your talents and skills.
- Join an honorary society if you are invited. They are not open to everyone so mem-

bership indicates a special academic honor and demonstrates an important achievement.

Student Comments about Campus Involvement

"Being brothers with such a diverse group has helped me learn to deal with people better. I have learned that what motivates and drives me is not the same for all people. Contrary to popular belief, being a Greek is not all party. There is a lot of work involved, and dedication is necessary for a productive group."

Management and Psychology major
Rush Director, Phi Sigma Kappa

"...possibly the most important benefit is the amazing hands-on experience I've had. As a R.A., I learned to be unbiased, deal with multi-cultural awareness, nurture and care for students who are struggling as college students, be a friend and a person of authority, enforce discipline and hall management, and perfect my interpersonal skills. I realized this year, as a senior, how much my R.A. job has prepared me for the world of teaching. Certainly, there are differences in the setting, the 'curriculum,' and the students; however, the fundamental aspects are very much the same."

Elementary Education major
R.A., Wilkinson Hall, and Orientation Leader

"I can't even begin to explain the benefits I have gained through my involvement. I have not only improved my interpersonal and communication skills, but also made lasting friendships. The most rewarding aspect was the constant interaction with students, faculty, and administrators, and the realization that I can make a difference at Clarion."

History major
President, Student Senate & Member of the State System Board of Governors

"I gained valuable leadership experience as well as learned to speak up for what I believe in. My speaking and decision-making skills were greatly strengthened. It was rewarding to look back on all that I had done with my committee and see our accomplishments."

Accounting major
V.P. of Fundraising, Accounting Club

Skills Developed Through Extracurricular Activities

Activities outside the classroom can have a significant impact on developing the qualifications that employers need. The following list provides a sampling of the skills that can be developed:

Social skills

By participating in campus activities you can learn to work with a wide variety of people: fellow students, faculty, administrators, alumni, and community leaders. Such participation helps you learn how to make introductions, converse, express your ideas, and contribute your thinking in meetings and discussions. Through social events, you learn how to dress for different occasions, use appropriate etiquette, and respect others. Your rough edges get smoothed out, and you learn to develop poise and self-confidence.

Managerial skills

Participation enables you to learn how committees work; why it is necessary to have rules, regulations, and procedures; how to get the necessary clearances to implement an event or project; what safety or security steps must be taken; and how knowledge and skills are passed from seniors, to juniors, to sophomores, to freshmen.

Planning skills

An important lesson to learn from activities is setting goals and objectives and then determining how to implement them and obtain the desired results. Planning involves not only determining what is to be achieved, but also when, how, and why it will be achieved. Planning also includes how to get the necessary money, space, equipment, supplies, and people for a project.

Organizing skills

Activities such as chairing a committee, planning a special event, and launching a special project use organizing skills. These involve developing the tasks to be performed, preparing a timeline, and selecting the right people to handle the responsibilities.

Supervising skills

The success of any venture depends on your ability to get other people involved in accomplishing the group's goals. Supervising skills include selecting the right people to do the job, making them feel part of a team effort, providing direction and feedback, organizing and delegating tasks, and following up with individuals or committees to ensure that responsibilities are done successfully and on time.

Interpersonal skills

Participating in extra-curricular activities helps you to learn the importance of getting along with peers, faculty, administrators, and visitors to the campus. For example, serving as host to guest speakers helps you develop the art of conversing. Participating on committees enables you to contribute your thoughts and energies toward the stated objectives. Cultivating friends, learning teamwork, forming a values system, working in a multi-cultural environment, and developing self-esteem and self-confidence are all benefits of dealing with others in campus activities.

Leadership skills

Every organization needs people who can organize activities, make suggestions, provide ideas, have vision, create action, and motivate others through their own commitment and enthusiasm. Campus activities give you many opportunities to test your own abilities, practice speaking before groups, make mistakes, plan agendas, run meetings, create programs or improve existing ones, get results, cooperate with others, and develop teamwork toward stated objectives.

Communication skills

All careers require a combination of both oral and written communication skills. Through campus activities you have many opportunities to express ideas, propose action, disagree with others, think on your feet, create posters, design advertising, develop programs, or write reports.

Community Service

People are motivated to volunteer for different reasons, but most volunteers have two characteristics in common:

- A willingness to work hard without pay
- A desire to make a difference in society and the world.

Volunteering to work for an organization provides an excellent opportunity to develop some of the skills you need for future employment situations. There are numerous campus, community, alumni, social, and professional organizations that need volunteers. You get the benefits of meeting new people while helping out others. Volunteering enables you to be visible in the community and develop valuable contacts.

The following guidelines will help you select an organization where both you and the organization benefit:

- Choose an organization geared toward your interests and abilities. Identify the organization's purpose.
- Determine if you want to volunteer in cause- or issue-oriented projects. For example, do you want to volunteer in a project that directly helps another person, such as mentoring, tutoring, visiting the elderly, or serving at a soup kitchen?
- Think about what you expect to get out of volunteering before you decide where to give your time and talents.
- Is your goal to:
 - Get exposure to potential career options?
 - Develop specific skills?
 - Meet people?
 - Become more knowledgeable about an interest area?
 - Have fun?
 - Supplement your professional skills?
- Evaluate how effectively the organization uses its volunteers before you sign on.
- Pick an organization and a schedule that fit into your life. Don't take on more than you can deliver. Prioritize the activities to which you want to contribute.

- Don't expect immediate results. Attendance at one or two meetings won't get you appointed to committee chairperson. Start out doing little tasks, such as making phone calls or distributing flyers, and soon you will be asked to take on more important responsibilities.
- Let people know you're willing to help in any capacity and learn new skills.

No one would disagree that the crunch of our daily lives sometimes makes it hard to do anything for anyone else. However, the benefits of volunteering are simply too good to pass up. Volunteering will make you feel better because you are helping others, and it will improve your chances of proving your capabilities to those who are in a position to hire you.

Student Comments about Community Service

"I gained the benefit of getting to know some very wonderful people. I learned that I could handle the pressure of a crisis situation. And I learned not to focus on myself, but on the other person. The most rewarding aspect of being a domestic violence hotline volunteer was knowing I was in a situation where I could help someone get out of an abusive relationship."

Psychology major
Domestic Violence Hotline Volunteer
SAFE (Stop Abuse for Everyone)

"People sometimes get caught up in college life, and they forget there is a world full of problems. My experience with community service has enlightened me to the world beyond college. I have definitely become a more diverse person. It inspired me to open my mind and realize that I have a lot to learn. I have had an incredible volunteer opportunity working with children who have spina bifida and I feel that I can inspire others to do the same. I hope to touch lives and give back what I received."

Special Education major
Volunteer, Saturday Service Day

Internships

An internship is a practical work experience related to your major or career goals. It gives you an opportunity to apply what you have learned in the classroom and to acquire new knowledge and skills. It is a sneak preview into a career and a short-term commitment to an organization with no strings attached on your or the employer's part.

The length of an internship may be a few weeks or months, on a part-time or full-time basis, during a semester or a summer. Some internships provide an opportunity to earn academic credits, while others do not. Compensation ranges from no pay to a regular salary.

Employers rate an internship as an important candidate qualification. It provides an on-the-job experience that gives you an edge over other applicants. It also provides these benefits:

- It helps you define your career goals and make them more specific. For instance, a sociology major interning in a local nursing home decided to focus on working with the elderly as a career.
- It helps you decide if your skills are as polished as they should be. For example, as a public accounting intern, you may discover that you need stronger writing skills. In college, you can take additional writing courses to strengthen your skills.
- It gives you a chance to learn if your career choice is really compatible with your aptitudes, skills, values, and interests. For instance, an education major decided to change majors after he participated in his first field experience. He was glad to learn then, not on his first job, that he wasn't cut out to be a teacher.
- An internship provides you with the opportunity to develop good work habits. You become less of a novice and more of a professional. Through observation and practice, you become aware of the reality of the working environment.
- It helps you develop job search skills. To obtain an internship, you learn skills, such as resume writing, interviewing, and application letter preparation.

- It gives you insight into finding a job in your field. Throughout your internship, you can make contacts and seek their advice about finding a job in the field.

To arrange an internship, contact your academic department for opportunities available, eligibility requirements, and procedures. Visit the Career Services Center for additional resources on internship opportunities.

Student Comments about Internships

"My internships reinforced my interest in the field of student affairs in higher education. The most rewarding aspect was having peers regard me as a professional. After my internship with Career Services was over, students still stopped me on campus to ask career-related questions."

Communication major
Intern, Clarion University Admissions Office
and Career Services Center

"Through my internship, I was able to see things that go on day to day on the job that you don't learn in the classroom. My writing skills were strengthened, I improved by business communication skills, and I became very confident in my own personal abilities. What is also rewarding is that my experience has helped me get a job with the hospital where I completed my internship."

Communication major
Public Relations Intern
Jameson Health System

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