Background
In his review of lessons learned from involvement research, Astin (1996) explained that involvement was “a powerful means of enhancing almost all aspects of the undergraduate student’s cognitive and affective development” (p. 590). In his book *What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited*, Astin (1993) described the peer group as “the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years” and that “students’ values, beliefs, and aspirations tend to change in the direction of the dominant values, beliefs, and aspirations” of their peers (p. 398).

One of the many ways college students create peer groups is through their involvement in cocurricular activities such as student organizations. In a study of institutions experiencing success in engaging students in college life, Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005) concluded that their success stemmed from a “wellspring of other cocurricular offerings that involve students in campus life, connect them to the institution, and provide leadership opportunities” and that “from the beginning these colleges and universities encourage their students to ‘get involved’” (p. 238).

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), in a review of over thirty years of research, found that co-curricular involvement has a positive impact on cognitive development, career-related skills, leadership abilities, interpersonal communication, and exposure to different beliefs and backgrounds. They also reported that “employers and corporate recruiters place considerable weight on student extracurricular involvement during college, particularly in leadership positions, in making hiring decisions” and that “participation in student organizations had a modest, but statistically significant, positive effect on the odds of a graduate securing employment” (p. 518). Other researchers found that students, through involvement in student organizations, improved their psychosocial development (Foubert & Grainger, 2006), intellectual development (Graham & Gisi, 2000), and self-confidence (Huang & Chang, 2004).

While there has been research conducted on specific types of student organizations and their contributions to student development, the research has been mostly confined to studies of Greek organizations, student governance groups, and intercollegiate athletics. College campuses today have a wide range of organizations to meet students’ academic and personal interests. Beeny (2003) suggested that future research might focus on “examining whether different types of student organizations influence the amount of expressed learning or the skills or competencies students report gaining” (p. 87). Gellin (2003) echoed the suggestion saying that “traditionally, scholars have used the moniker *clubs and organizations* to represent the large number of sponsored activities available on college campuses” but that the broad focus “may be limited” and that a “closer examination of specific clubs and organizations may be warranted” (p. 759).

The purpose of this study was to discover the motivations for involved students in joining academic or non-academic student organizations, why they stay in these organizations, what they are learning in these organizations, and what the impact of that learning is on their academic performance.
Methods and Sample

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Purpose of Project
This survey is part of a larger, multi-year project that seeks to discover activities students are participating in outside of the classroom that can impact their academic performance. In the first, or benchmarking, year of the project, a decision was made to recruit a cohort of undergraduate students so a variety of data could be collected on their experience throughout the 2005-2006 school year.

Participant Authentication
An in-house, interactive web-based system was created for the project. The system allowed students to visit the project’s main page then log-in to the campus authentication system. The authentication process involved matching a student’s university identification number against the campus enrollment records for a confirmation of their student status. Their identification number was then compared to the project’s official participant list. If the identification numbers were not a match, the system did not allow a student to continue with the process. If a match occurred, students were directed to another project web page where personalized survey links were posted. Survey links remained posted until students completed them or the survey was officially closed.

Sample Recruitment
An initial random sample of 1,500 students, stratified by undergraduate classification, was generated in early August 2005 (referred to as the “active sample”). A back-up sample of 1,500 students, also stratified by undergraduate classification, was generated for the purpose of replacing original subjects who declined to participate in the project (referred to as the “back-up sample”). Out of 3,003 total students, 75 had to be removed due to reasons such as never enrolling in classes, having classifications outside of the undergraduate years (i.e., graduate student, professional student, etc.), or having inaccurate contact information that prevented communication about the project.

The official seven-week recruitment period began in early August 2005 when postal mail letters were sent to the permanent addresses of the students in the active sample. A week later, the same letters were sent through the campus e-mail system to all students in the active sample. The project’s web address was provided in both the postal mail and e-mail letters so students could complete a registration survey. The registration survey asked whether or not they wished to participate in the project along with some demographic information. In an effort to increase response rates, reminders were sent via e-mail approximately once a week throughout the recruiting period to students who had not yet responded. Those who declined participation were replaced by someone in the back-up sample. By early September 2005, due to a lower than expected response rate from the active sample, a decision was made to move all remaining students in the back-up sample into the active sample so a larger cohort could be recruited.

In mid-September 2005, a campus student organization was hired to call potential participants who had not yet responded and encourage them to sign up for the project. The call list originally included 2,084 students. Almost half of the students (924) were removed from the call list because of inaccurate or non-existent phone numbers. The remaining 1,160 students received at least one phone call; some had up to three calls. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of the calls were successful in reaching the specific student listed, 32% of the calls resulted in messages being left on voicemail systems or with roommates, and 31% were unsuccessful in reaching anyone. Of the calls that made direct contact with students (n=430), 33% of those students registered for the project, another 37% declined participation,
and 30% said they would register but did not follow through by logging into the system and completing the registration survey. For the students who received voicemail messages or messages left with roommates (n=371), 13% registered for the project, 20% declined, and 67% did not respond.

At the end of the official recruiting period, the project had 699 confirmed participants, 617 who had declined, and 1,632 students who had not responded. In an effort to increase the cohort size, a decision was made to include the students who had not responded in the “confirmed” participant list. Unless they requested removal from the project, participants on the confirmed list received all survey notices and could participate at any time. This resulted in an additional 117 participants. The confirmed list was closed on February 17, 2006. Participants who had not responded to any survey request by that time were removed from the list.

**Final Project Sample**
The final project sample (n=2928) included 815 confirmed participants (28%), 1,412 people who did not respond (48%), and 700 who declined (24%). At the conclusion of the data collection year, 74 students were removed from the “confirmed” list because they registered for the project but never completed a survey. The final number for the confirmed participants was 741, or 25% of the original sample. Table 1 illustrates the demographics of the participants (confirmed, declined, and not yet heard from) compared to the Fall 2005 undergraduate demographics at Texas A&M University (Office of Institutional Studies and Planning, 2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Category</th>
<th>Active Participants (n=741)</th>
<th>Registered but Did Not Participate (n=74)</th>
<th>Declined Participants (n=700)</th>
<th>Did Not Respond (n=1412)</th>
<th>OISP Fall 2005 undergraduate data (n=36,130)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Campus</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-Campus</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Sample demographics for the project and official undergraduate demographics for Fall 2005*

Participants were offered an opportunity to write in another ethnicity. Five participants wrote in multi-racial categories including Egyptian, Mongol, Pakistani, and two bi-racial combinations (White and Peruvian, and White and Hispanic).
SURVEY OVERVIEW
The Involvement Survey was posted on April 10, 2006, for participants who indicated they were involved in student organizations during the research year. An e-mail message was sent to let them know about the survey. A total of five reminders were sent to participants who had not completed the survey. The survey was officially closed on May 15, 2006. Three-hundred fifty-four (354) participants responded to the survey out of the 554 who were sent a survey, resulting in a 64% response rate. Demographics for the survey participants are provided in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Category</th>
<th>Involvement Survey Participants (n=354)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Campus</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-Campus</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Survey participant demographics

It should be noted that when academic information such as cumulative grade point average is reported, it contains only the data from participants who specifically granted permission for that information to be used in this study. In the overall sample, 75% (n=557) of the participants granted permission, 17% did not grant permission, and 8% did not respond to the request.

Survey Results
Results include frequency percentages, means, and standard deviations (sd) for the number of people (n) who responded to the question. For ease of reading, frequency percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%.

Within the report, there are references to “confidence intervals.” Confidence intervals provide a range of values, within a specific probability, where the true mean would be located for the population being considered. For the purposes of this report, a 95% confidence level (“95% CI”) was used. In other words, for the population being considered, there is 95% confidence that the true mean is between the lower bound of the range and the upper bound of the range.
Responses to qualitative questions were analyzed using a formal content analysis designed to minimize researcher bias. During the qualitative analysis, one staff member from the Department of Student Life Studies participated in each step of the process for continuity purposes. Additional staff members from the Division of Student Affairs and the University participated in the analysis. Once the analysis was completed, the participating staff members reviewed the summary as part of the member checking process. Student comments developed into themes that can be observed within this report. Comments chosen for inclusion were selected on the basis of being well written, easy to comprehend, and representative of the main ideas expressed by students in each identified theme and sub-theme.

The results are divided into six sections based on the questions asked in the survey: Membership in Organizations, Motivation to Join Organizations, Reasons for Persistence in Organizations, Skills or Knowledge Gained Through Organizations, Faculty Support of Organizations, and Academic Impact of Organizations.

SECTION 1: MEMBERSHIP IN ORGANIZATIONS

Based on data available from the Texas A&M University Department of Student Activities, there were over 200 academic student organizations and over 500 non-academic student organizations available to participants during the data collection period. The first survey question asked participants if they were involved in academic or non-academic student organizations. Of the 286 participants who responded to the question, 23% were involved in the academic organizations (AO), 52% were involved in the non-academic student organizations (NAO), and 25% indicated that they were involved in both types of organizations. Table 3 illustrates the demographics of each group. Academic organizations tended to have more participation from juniors and seniors than other classifications while there were no discernible differences with the other two groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Category</th>
<th>Involved in Academic Organizations (AO) (n=65)</th>
<th>Involved in Non-Academic Organizations (NAO) (n=149)</th>
<th>Involved in Both Types of Organizations (n=72)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Campus</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-Campus</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Demographics of participants in each category of involvement
SECTION 2: MOTIVATION TO JOIN ORGANIZATIONS

Participants were asked to explain why they first became involved in their specific type of student organization. The three main reasons AO members cited for joining their organizations were to learn more about their field of study (26 comments), build their resume (21 comments), and network with students in their same major (19 comments). By contrast, NAO members joined their organizations for more personal development reasons such as meeting new people (50 comments), having service opportunities (27 comments), and personal interests that were met through their involvement (26 comments). The major themes that emerged from all of the responses were:

1. Career Development;
2. Relationships;
3. Personal development;
4. Academic reasons; and
5. General Involvement Issues.

Theme 1: Career Development
The participants’ career development reasons for joining student organizations included wanting to learn more about their field of study, professional development opportunities, and building their resume. AO members offered a total of 64 comments concerning joining student organizations for career development reasons compared to 3 comments offered by NAO members, all of which were contained within the resume building sub-theme. Below are some examples of the reasons participants joined their organizations:

Field of Study
- “…try to become familiar with the industry that I will pursue in a couple of years” (AO member, male, junior, Engineering major)
- “There are guest speakers in my chosen field and I am able to ask questions and learn more about the field that I am interested in” (AO member, female, junior, Science major)

Professional Development
- “Because it is something I want to do in the future. I am in the physical therapy organization and that is what I want to do as a career” (AO member, female, junior, Education major)

Resume Building
- “…help build my resume for future jobs prospects” (AO member, female, senior, Agriculture major)
- “…because it looks good on a resume” (AO member, male, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)

Theme 2: Relationships
Participants cited a variety of reasons for joining their student organizations that centered on relationships such as the desire to meet people and make new friends, joining because someone they knew was a member, sharing common interests with others, and networking. AO members offered a total of 53 comments compared to 102 comments offered by NAO members. Below are some examples of the participant comments in each of the four sub-theme areas:
Meeting People and Making Friends
- “Because it was a great opportunity to meet others…” (AO member, male, sophomore, Engineering major)
- “Because I wanted to meet a more diverse group of people” (NAO member, male, freshman, Engineering major)
- “I became involved to meet new people” (NAO member, female, freshman, Engineering major)

Existing Ties to the Organization
- “All of my new college friends were in it” (AO member, female, freshman, General Studies major)
- “Actually a friend of mine who was involved at the time convinced me to join” (NAO member, male, senior, Liberal Arts major)
- “My parents were a part of it in college and really enjoyed it” (NAO member, female, sophomore, General Studies major)

Common Interests
- “I wanted to be around people that were interested in the same things academically that I was” (AO member, male, sophomore, Agriculture major)
- “To be around people who are in the same major or fields of study” (AO member, female, junior, Geosciences major)

Networking
- “I thought it would be a good opportunity for networking” (AO member, female, senior, Business major)
- “Get to know people that I would be taking classes with” (AO member, female, sophomore, Education major)
- “In order to get to know the professors of the department” (AO member, female, freshman, Science major)
- “To have a wider scope of interaction with people who are not in my major or in engineering” (NAO member, male, sophomore, Engineering major)
- “Get to know other people in different fields of study” (NAO member, female, junior, Education major)

Theme 3: Personal Development
Along with career development and building relationships, participants also joined organizations in order to receive some kind of personal benefit such as addressing personal interests, obtaining service opportunities, building skills, and having a sense of belonging. AO members offered a total of 48 comments concerning personal development compared to 128 comments offered by NAO members. Below are some examples of the participant comments in each of the four sub-theme areas:

Meet Personal Interests
- “[The organization] deals with a high school competition I was involved in” (AO member, male, junior, Engineering major)
- “I thought [the organization] was interesting and it was something I wanted to be part of” (AO member, female, junior, Liberal Arts major)
• “This organization helps to preserve wildlife and the Texas coast, things that I hold dear to my heart” (NAO member, male, sophomore, Architecture major)
• “Because I passionately believe in the cause it champions” (NAO member, female, senior, Veterinary Medicine major)
• “I was a member of this group in my home town” (NAO member, male, junior, Engineering major)

**Service Opportunities**
• “I like to volunteer” (AO member, female, junior, Business major)
• “I was looking for an organization that provided a chance for community service” (NAO member, female, sophomore, General Studies major)
• “To participate in service of the campus and community” (NAO member, female, senior, Business major)

**Skills Building and Learning**
• “To gain knowledge” (AO member, male, senior, Engineering major)
• “…the organizations can provide you with useful information” (AO member, female, junior, Engineering major)
• “Learn more about the real world that textbooks can’t teach” (AO member, female, junior, Education major)
• “Gain more leadership experience” (NAO member, male, freshman, Engineering major)
• “They also make you a rounder person—perhaps more so than organizations sponsored by your college or department, as they show that you are interested in more than just engineering” (NAO member, female, junior, Engineering major)

**Sense of Belonging**
• “To find a group that would make the large university setting a little smaller” (NAO member, female, senior, Education major)
• “I wanted to be involved in something small to have a group of consistent friends” (NAO member, male, senior, Agriculture major)

**Theme 4: Academic Reasons**
AO members, but not NAO members, also had academic reasons for joining the academically-focused student organizations. Their 15 comments addressed issues such as preparing for advanced degrees, becoming involved in their academic department, obtaining academic assistance, and discovering opportunities such as scholarships and participating in the governance of the academic units. Below are some examples of the AO members academic reasons for joining their organizations:

**Advanced Degree**
• “I believe that it will help me to get into Veterinary school” (AO member, female, freshman, Veterinary Medicine major)

**Academic Department Involvement**
• “I wanted to get involved with the department” (AO member, male, junior, Agriculture major)

**Academic Assistance**
• “To get help with classes” (AO member, female, junior, Engineering major)
Opportunities

- “To become more involved in decision making processes that affect me” (AO member, female, sophomore, Engineering major)

Theme 5: General Involvement Issues

Participants from both types of organizations described general involvement issues as reasons they joined their organizations such as wanting to be involved with something, having fun and avoiding boredom, and having an escape from studying. AO members offered a total of 19 comments in this theme area while NAO members offered 82 comments. Examples of the comments are contained below in each of the three sub-theme areas:

Getting Involved

- “I wanted to be involved with something that I enjoy” (AO member, female, senior, Agriculture major)
- “I wanted to experience the other education that is such a big part of student life on the A&M campus” (NAO member, female, junior, Agriculture major)

Having Fun/Avoiding Boredom

- “Something to do” (AO member, male, freshman, General Studies major)
- “I needed something to entertain me” (NAO member, male, senior, Science major)

Escape from Studying

- “It was a nice reprieve from studies” (NAO member, female, senior, Liberal Arts major)
- “I also just wanted the opportunity to do something constructive with my free time” (NAO member, female, junior, Agriculture major)

SECTION 3: REASONS FOR PERSISTENCE IN ORGANIZATIONS

Participants were asked to explain why they have stayed involved in their specific type of student organization. The three top reasons AO members stayed involved in their organizations were because of the fun and enjoyment they gained (26 comments), the opportunities to build their resume (21 comments), and career preparation activities in which they participated (17 comments). NAO members, on the other hand, stayed involved because of the friends they made (50 comments), the fun and enjoyment they gained (42 comments), and opportunities they had for personal growth (39 comments). The major themes that emerged from all of the responses were:

1. Personal Benefits;
2. Relationships;
3. Organizational Reasons;
4. Career Development; and

Theme 1: Personal Benefits

Participants from both types of organizations cited a variety of personal benefits as the reasons for their persistence in their chosen organizations. AO members offered 81 comments centering on fun,
enjoyment, and learning. NAO members contributed 127 comments, most of them focused on fun and enjoyment as the main benefit from staying involved in their organizations. Below are some examples of what participants had to say about persisting in their groups:

**Fun and Enjoyment**

- “I enjoy the work that we do” (AO member, female, senior, Education major)
- “They’re a fun way to involved with the university” (AO member, female, sophomore, Education major)
- “It is fun and I really enjoy it” (NAO member, female, freshman, Business major)

**Skills and Learning**

- “I feel I have learned more from this club than from the classroom” (AO member, female, sophomore, Agriculture major)
- “To become a better speaker and not as shy when talking to others” (AO member, male, junior, Engineering major)
- “It has given me a lot of opportunities to improve my leadership skills” (NAO member, female, senior, Business major)
- “I have learned many valuable skills” (NAO member, male, senior, Engineering major)

**Opportunities and Experiences**

- “It gives me a sense of belonging to the school” (AO member, female, junior, Business major)
- “Although my involvement takes up a lot of time and occasionally causes stress, it allows me to give back to the community, which is something that my mother has ingrained in me since birth” (AO member, female, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)
- “Student organizations not sponsored by my college give me something to be passionate about besides my main academic concentration” (NAO member, female, senior, Agriculture major)
- “The sense of fulfillment I get when I’ve helped a child understand a concept or advance their reading makes the entire experience worth it” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)
- “The purpose of attending college, or so I have always believed but I don’t think most students at A&M grasp, is to gain exposure to other people, places, and information so that I can grow as a human being” (NAO member, female, senior, Veterinary Medicine major)

**Theme 2: Relationships**

Participants cited an assortment of reasons for staying involved that centered on relationships such as networking, developing friendships and personal relationships, and having social opportunities. AO members offered a total of 58 comments that were mostly focused on the networking opportunities provided in their organizations. NAO members generated 109 comments and their main focus was friendships and personal relationships. Below are some examples of the participant comments in each of the three sub-theme areas:

**Networking**

- “It is nice to have a group of people that you can call up and meet to study” (AO member, male, sophomore, Agriculture major)
• “To talk to companies about co-ops, internships, and full-time jobs” (AO member, female, junior, Engineering major)
• “Develop relationships with professors and staff” (AO member, female, senior, Agriculture major)

Friends and Personal Relationships
• “I think it is a great way to make friends” (AO member, female, freshman, General Studies major)
• “Because of the people I have met” (AO member, female, senior, Liberal Arts major)
• “Have made my best friends in college there” (NAO member, female, freshman, Agriculture major)
• “The friends I have met have created a positive experience that I choose to remain a part of. I do intend on joining student organizations specifically relevant to my major in the future, however” (NAO member, male, freshman, General Studies major)
• “I like the people and what we do as a group. I think you also need to be in organizations that aren’t for your major. It’s a way to network, make friends that aren’t like the friends in all of your classes. It’s really just something fun to do!” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Business major)

Social Opportunities
• “I enjoy spending time with other members of the organization” (AO member, female, senior, Engineering major)
• “I have enjoyed getting to know new people” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Engineering major)
• “I am involved with students and faculty in my college and being involved in other organizations gives me the chance to meet a completely different group” (NAO member, male, senior, Business major)

Theme 3: Organizational Reasons
Participants from both types of organizations explained that they stayed involved in their groups because of issues such as the mission and goals of the organizations, their interest and passion for the organizations, and how the organizations met their expectations. AO members offered 11 comments in this category, mostly centered on their interest in the mission and goals of the organization. NAO members, on the other hand, contributed 75 comments that focused more on how the organizations met their expectations and their personal passion for the organization. Below are some examples of the comments participants offered in each of the three sub-themes:

Organizational Mission and Goals
• “The club does good things for the community and for our department” (AO member, female, senior, Agriculture major)
• “Because I see their purpose and goal as something I want to be a part of” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)
• “I think they still serve a good purpose and whether they are sponsored by a college seems irrelevant” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)

Interest and Passion for the Organization
• “I like the old lady that I visit. She taught me how to crochet, gave me a great broccoli chicken casserole recipe, and we watch Spanish soap operas together. That is
something I would not be able to do with my friends up here” (NAO member, female, junior, Science major)
- “I enjoy the activities they offer” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Business major)
- “Because I LOVE IT!! It’s absolutely amazing!” (NAO member, female, freshman, Science major)

Meeting Expectations
- “The organizations that I have chosen to remain in have retained my membership because they succeeded in meeting my expectations” (NAO member, male, freshman, Liberal Arts major)

Theme 4: Career Development
The participants’ career development reasons for staying involved in their student organizations included building their resume, preparing for their career, and obtaining letters of recommendation. AO members offered a total of 42 comments compared to 5 comments offered by NAO members, all of which were contained within the resume building sub-theme. Below are some examples of the career development reasons participants stayed in their organizations:

Resume Building
- “It will look good on my resume when I am looking for jobs” (AO member, female, freshman, Business major)
- “To have something to put on my resume” (AO member, male, junior, Engineering major)
- “It looks good on my resume” (NAO member, male, junior, Engineering major)

Career Preparation
- “We have interesting guest speakers come talk about their experiences” (AO member, female, junior, Education major)
- “Different companies come and visit giving presentations that I find interesting” (AO member, male, freshman, Engineering major)

Letters of Recommendation
- “To keep up contacts for the all-important recommendations” (AO member, female, senior, Science major)

Theme 5: Non-Academic Motivation
A final category for staying involved with student organizations concerned a variety of non-academic motivations such as obligation and loyalty, having their involvement required by some outside entity, and the minimal time commitments necessary to be involved. AO members, who provided 7 comments, stayed involved in their organizations mainly out of obligation and loyalty while NAO members, who provided 12 comments, stayed involved because it was a requirement.

Obligation and Loyalty
- “Loyalty to the members of the organization” (AO member, male, junior, Engineering major)
- “I made a commitment to stay with the organization” (NAO member, male, senior, Agriculture major)
**Required Involvement**

- “It is part of being a member of the Church” (NAO member, male, junior, Engineering major)
- “To fulfill my scholarship requirement” (NAO member), female, freshman, General Studies major)
- “One year commitment was required” (NAO member), male, senior, Agriculture major)

**Time Commitments**

- “It didn’t take too much time away from homework and my grades didn’t fall” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)

### SECTION 4: SKILLS OR KNOWLEDGE GAINED THROUGH ORGANIZATIONS

Participants were asked to explain what skills or knowledge they were gaining from their involvement in student organizations that they did not gain from the classroom. The three main skills or knowledge areas mentioned by AO members were learning about their chosen field (45 comments), networking with others (20 comments), and interpersonal communication skills (16 comments). For NAO members, the three main skills and knowledge areas they highlighted were interpersonal communication skills (127 comments), leadership skills (78 comments), and general business skills (58 comments). The major themes that emerged from all of the responses were:

1. Skills;
2. Interpersonal Relations;
3. Career Development;
4. Serving Others;
5. Knowledge Acquisition; and

**Theme 1: Skills**

In terms of what skills participants learned from their involvement in student organizations, AO members, who offered 47 comments, thought they learned leadership skills, general business skills, and time management skills. NAO members, who offered 280 comments, also cited leadership skills and general business skills. In addition, they explained that their experiences provided them with a lot of new skills in general (51 comments). Below are some examples of the different skills participants believed they learned through their student organizations:

**Leadership Skills**

- “I am gaining more leadership” (AO member, female, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)
- “How to be a leader, in practice as well as theory” (NAO member, male, junior, Liberal Arts major)
- “I am gaining actual hands-on leadership experience. You don’t get what I am getting from the classroom” (NAO member, male, senior, Agriculture major)

**General Business Skills**

- “Organizational skills that have come from being a captain for a national competition” (AO member, male, sophomore, Engineering major)
• “Management/business skills that you don’t usually pick up in a technical major like mine” (AO member, male, senior, Engineering major)
• “The importance of deadlines when other people are relying on you” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)
• “I’m learning responsibility” (NAO member, female, freshman, Veterinary Medicine major)
• “I have learned the importance of paperwork…(and) I have learned the importance of setting concrete goals towards more abstract visions” (NAO member, female, senior, Liberal Arts major)
• “How to plan the logistics and operations of a large-scale program” (NAO member, female, senior, Science major)

Skills in General
• “Just learning more” (AO member, male, junior, Veterinary Medicine major)
• “I am learning about my personal beliefs” (NAO member, female, junior, Education major)

Time Management
• “Time management skills” (AO member, female, freshman, Business major)
• “I’ve had to develop time management skills that I wouldn’t have learned if I would have been involved strictly with academics” (NAO member, female, junior, Science major)
• “Juggling a busy schedule in order to fit things into my schedule that are important (health)” (NAO member, female, senior, Architecture major)

Communication Skills
• “Confidence in speaking to administrators” (AO member, female, sophomore, Engineering major)
• “Communication skills” (AO member, female, freshman, Veterinary Medicine major)
• “I have learned how to better communicate with people” (NAO member, female, senior, Liberal Arts major)

Public Speaking Skills
• “It has helped my public speaking skills” (AO member, female, senior, Agriculture major)
• “I am gaining public speaking experience” (NAO member, male, senior, Agriculture major)
• “How to perform and speak in front of very large audiences” (NAO member, female, junior, Education major)

Critical Thinking Skills
• “Encountering and dealings with problems that come up” (AO member, female, sophomore, Agriculture major)
• “Coming up with my own ideas instead of mimicking a teacher” (AO member, female, sophomore, Agriculture major)
• “(I’ve) grown in creative thinking” (NAO member, male, junior, Business major)
• “Logical reasoning” (NAO member, female, junior, Business major)
**Stress Management**
- “I’ve had to develop stress management skills that I wouldn’t have learned if I would have been involved strictly with academics” (NAO member, female, junior, Science major)

**Theme 2: Interpersonal Relations**
Many participants explained that they had improved their interpersonal skills through involvement with student organizations. AO members, who provided a total of 42 comments, focused mainly on networking skills (20 comments) and interaction skills (16 comments). NAO members, who provided a total of 153 comments, overwhelmingly focused on interaction skills as what they learned from student organizations (127 comments). Examples of what participants learned are provided below in each of the three sub-themes:

**Interaction Skills**
- “I now enjoy approaching new people and making conversation” (AO member, female, junior, Business major)
- “As an officer I had the opportunity to watch officer meetings take place, which gives an interesting picture of the decision making process in a group” (AO member, female, senior, Engineering major)
- “How to interact effectively with people” (NAO member, male, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)
- “Learning how to balance a job of placating drunken students having fun, while still getting them home safely is something that cannot be taught from a podium or textbook” (NAO member, male, junior, Liberal Arts major)
- “I’ve learned how to interact with many different people who have different experiences, opinions, and communication styles than my own” (NAO member, female, junior, Science major)
- “I am gaining valuable social skills” (NAO member, female, freshman, Engineering major)

**Networking**
- “You meet a lot of people that could one day help you out to get a job” (AO member, female, senior, Education major)
- “I am gaining connections with people that I might not otherwise make in a classroom environment” (AO member, female, freshman, Engineering major)
- “Being a leader in this group has been a good way to learn about networking” (NAO member, female, senior, Education major)

**Developing Relationships**
- “How to be great friends even when we are very different” (NAO member, female, freshman, Science major)

**Theme 3: Career Development**
Participants described skills associated with career development as what they learned from their student organizations. AO members offered 64 total comments with most focused on learning about their field and the opportunities within it (45 comments). NAO members offered 22 total comments
which almost exclusively focused on learning job specific skills (21 comments). Examples of participant comments are contained in the three sub-theme areas below:

**Learning About Academic Field**
- “Speakers give us a first hand look at their own experience as a doctor, dentist, or student in professional school” (AO member, female, freshman, Science major)
- “A better understanding of the cultures of the businesses that I will be involved with in the future” (AO member, male, senior, Engineering major)
- “I am learning about the different opportunities available to me such as graduate schools and programs…” (AO member, female, junior, Science major)
- “I learned a lot about internship opportunities” (AO member, male, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)

**Job Specific Skills**
- “Hands on experience of what happens in the pre-flight stages of a space mission” (AO member, male, junior, Engineering major)
- “We do a lot of demonstrations for elementary-age kids so I’m learning how to work with younger children” (AO member, female, senior, Science major)
- “How to deal with bureaucracy in a way to get what I want out of it” (NAO member, female, senior, Science major)
- “Courtroom experience, with my participation in a mock trial” (NAO member, male, freshman, Liberal Arts major)

**Job Search Skills**
- “We will be meeting with people from different companies which may help with my interview skills” (AO member, female, junior, Business major)
- “Portfolio skills” (AO member, female, senior, Architecture major)
- “Help with future applications” (NAO member, female, freshman, Science major)

**Theme 4: Serving Others**
Some participants said they learned more about serving others through the volunteer activities of their organizations. A total of 6 comments were provided by AO members and 27 comments were provided by NAO members. Examples of what they said are included below:

- “How to be involved in the community” (AO member, male, junior, Agriculture major)
- “Importance of giving back to your community” (NAO member, female, freshman, Business major)
- “I learn more about service and the community in which I am involved in” (NAO member, female, senior, Education major)
- “How to work with kids who are from low-income districts. These children will frequently share their home experiences, which are often stressful for them” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)

**Theme 5: Knowledge Acquisition**
AO members offered 16 comments about the type of knowledge they had acquired from their involvement in student organizations. Their comments centered on learning about the “real world”, reinforcing concepts learned in class, and discovering how to find academic assistance. A few examples of what they learned are included below:
Learning About the Real World

- “How to be prepared for life after college in the working environment” (AO member, male, freshman, Engineering major)
- “I am able to meet people out in the community that teach me life lessons” (AO member, female, senior, Education major)

Reinforcement of Class Concepts

- “I gain very few skills that I would not also gain in a class, but the skills are reinforced through the organization” (AO member, female, freshman, Agriculture major)
- “I get the chance to discuss philosophical issues (I am a philosophy major) in a laid back and comfortable setting with my peers who are interested in the same field. It is discussion without the worry of grades or professors” (AO member, female, senior, Liberal Arts major)

Finding Academic Assistance

- “I have meet (sic) so many friends that have been able to help me and give me advice about classes they have taken” (AO member, female, junior, Business major)
- One participant said “There aren’t really any particular skills but there is definitely a lot of knowledge and tidbits of information that you pick up in these organizations that are useful for your future as a student” (AO member, female, junior, Engineering major)

Theme 6: Not Much

A handful of participants did not feel that they learned anything from their involvement in student organizations. Six comments came from AO members and three came from NAO members. Some of their comments are included below:

- “None. I most find the club to be a social event, rather than a learning one” (AO member, female, senior, Liberal Arts major)
- “Not many skills are taught at the meetings” (AO member, male, junior, Engineering major)
- “These organizations usually don’t have anything to do with information I would learn in the classroom, so I learn a lot of things that usually don’t have to do with engineering there. And to be totally honest, I don’t really get a lot out of classroom experience either—even though I go to every class. I usually wind up having to teach it to myself through practice problems, the book, or going and asking the teacher personally. I don’t mean to be negative, but that’s the truth” (NAO member, female, junior, Engineering major)

SECTION 5: FACULTY SUPPORT OF ORGANIZATIONS

Participants were asked if they believed that faculty in general supported their type of student organization. For participants involved only in academic student organizations, 92% believed that faculty supported academic student organizations. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of participants involved only in non-academic student organizations believed faculty supported their organizations. For participants who involved in both academic and non-academic student organizations, 96% felt
faculty supported academic student organizations while 77% thought the faculty supported non-academic student organizations.

SECTION 6: ACADEMIC IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONS

Participants were asked to rate how their involvement in the different types of organizations impacted their academic performance using the choices “Positive Impact,” “Negative Impact,” and “No Impact.” Table 4 illustrates that most participants were split between organizations having no impact or a positive impact on their academic performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization Involvement</th>
<th>Positive Impact</th>
<th>Negative Impact</th>
<th>No Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Organizations (n=65)</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Academic Organizations (n=149)</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Types of Organizations (n=72)—IMPACT OF ACADEMIC ORGANIZATIONS</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Types of Organizations (n=72)—IMPACT OF NON-ACADEMIC ORGANIZATIONS</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Self-reported impact of organization participation on academic performance

In addition to their self-assessment of the academic impact, the cumulative grade point averages were compared for each group through the use of a 95% CI. Table 5 illustrates that while many of the participants believed that involvement in their specific type of organization had a positive impact on academic performance, there were no differences in grade point averages when observed for each type of organization. However, the participants who were involved in both types of student organizations had higher grade point averages than those who were involved in only one type of organization. It should be cautioned that this finding does not address causality. It may be that students with higher grade point averages feel capable of taking on multiple activities without negatively impacting their academic performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization Involvement</th>
<th>Mean (sd)</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for Cumulative Grade Point Averages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involved in Academic Organizations (n=65)</td>
<td>3.000 (.489)</td>
<td>2.879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in Non-Academic Organizations (n=149)</td>
<td>2.981 (.622)</td>
<td>2.880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in Both Types of Organizations (n=72)</td>
<td>3.293 (.566)</td>
<td>3.160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Confidence intervals for GPAs by type of involvement
**Explanation of Academic Impact**

All participants were asked to explain why they chose their specific impact rating for organizations. The three main issues AO members described when explaining the academic impact of organizations were in the areas of time management (26 comments), field knowledge (22 comments), and general motivation and peer relationships (11 comments each). For NAO members, the top three issues were time management (37 comments), personal responsibility (21 comments), and academic motivation (18 comments). The theme areas below provide additional information on how these issues impacted the academic performance of participants. The major themes that emerged from all of the responses were:

1. Interaction Between Organizations and Academics
2. Relationships
3. Time Management
4. Personal Development
5. Learning

**Theme 1: Interaction Between Organizations and Academics**

Participants from both types of organizations described how their involvement had positive, negative, and no impacts on their academic performance. Those who believed involvement in organizations had a positive impact on academic performance (16 comments from AO members, 39 from NAO members) described how they were required to have good grades to be a member. AO members said that their participation in academic organizations reminds them what they are working toward and that motivates them to do well. NAO members mentioned that their organizations supported and emphasized studying and provided them with opportunities they would not have had otherwise. Those who believed organizations had a negative impact on academic performance (3 comments from AO members, 9 from NAO members) explained that participation took energy away from studying and could be distracting. Those who believed involvement in organizations had no impact on academic performance (5 comments each from AO and NAO members) said that organizations and academics were two separate issues that did not affect each other.

Outside the topic of how organizations affect academic performance, NAO members introduced the idea that some faculty members discourage students from becoming involved. No AO members made the same claim.

Examples of comments from both sub-themes and their impact ratings are contained below:

**Effect of Organizations on Academic Performance**

**Positive Impact**

- “It continually reinforces the fact that I need to keep up my grades to even have a job in my field” (AO member, female, junior, Science major)
- “You have to maintain a certain GPR to be an officer in the clubs, and in one club, we actually have to maintain a 2.5 to ensure good students are the ones leading others” (AO member, female, senior, Agriculture major)
- “Going to meetings changes my perspective and continually reminds me of why I work as hard as I do in my classes—because I want to pursue a career and be successful” (AO member, female, junior, Veterinary Medicine major)
- “We are required to have study hours and in turn this helps us study and get better grades” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)
• “Our overall chapter GPR is the highest among all of the sororities and the greek average is above the all women’s average. I have raised my GPR during the time I have been involved with the sorority” (NAO member, female, senior, Business major)

• “My organization encourages me to work hard and places me in an environment where others work hard” (NAO member, female, sophomore, General Studies major)

**Negative Impact**

• “My involvement has hurt my academics because I am too much involved” (AO member, male, sophomore, Engineering major)

• “I was a 3.5, now I’m a 2.7, BUT I can legitimatly (sic) say that I’m smarter and better off for having been a member of those clubs…so perhaps the answer you are looking for is better off…but my grades have gone down” (NAO member, male, junior, Liberal Arts major)

• “There have been times where I put the interests of the organization or the people I’m serving ahead of my studying time and I believe this has also had a major impact on my grades” (NAO member, female, junior, Science major)

**No Impact**

• “I work independently of my experience with student organizations. Student organizations help impact my future, not my academic performance” (AO member, female, junior, Liberal Arts major)

• “My grades come only from my own work, and no other source” (AO member, male, senior, Engineering major)

• “Being involved does not make me try any harder” (AO member, female, senior, Architecture major)

• “Our advisor understands that it is school first” (NAO member, female, senior, Science major)

**Faculty Discouragement**

**Negative Impact**

• “I feel that my professors think that all my time should be spent on class, assignments, and the departments’ organizations. I feel they don’t realize the value of my other education” (NAO member, female, senior, Architecture major)

• “The professors and advisors in certain departments do not support my organization and have actually moved to have some people not join the organization by telling them that they would not be able to successfully complete their program if they remained involved with the organization” (NAO member, male, senior, Agriculture major)

**Theme 2: Relationships**

Participants from both types of organizations described how they built relationships with others that were based on some future purpose. In terms of fellow students, AO (16 comments) and NAO members (14 comments) explained that they enjoyed networking with the other students in their organizations because they were able to obtain study partners or learn more about what to expect in class. AO members also described networking with faculty and staff who were able to provide academic assistance of some kind. All of the ideas introduced by the participants focused on the positive impact of the relationships they gained through their involvement.
Participants also described the personal benefits obtained from organizational relationships. Two AO members cited things they obtained from their relationships such as one participant who explained that he felt more comfortable during class presentations because he knew many of his classmates through his organization. Another AO participant said she benefited from her academic student organization because she met people who do not drink. NAO members offered 11 comments, all focused on issues such as providing emotional support and encouragement.

NAO members explained, in 6 comments, that organization involvement provided them the opportunity to meet new people and make friends. AO members did not mention building relationships outside of the networking sub-theme.

A few of the comments from each sub-theme and impact rating are provided below:

**Networking**

*Positive Impact*

- “Being able to know people from your department in your classes allows for you to swap notes and study together” (AO member, female, senior, Agriculture major)
- “Friends in my organization help me understand the material in my classes which has greatly improved my grades” (AO member, female, junior, Business major)
- “By getting involved I have been able to get to know my professors on a one on one basis. This helps me when I have a problem. I can talk to the professor and not feel intimidated” (AO member, male, junior, Engineering major)
- “I also can meet classmates and then study with them for a particular class” (NAO member, female, freshman, Science major)
- (Positive Impact) “Made friends who are willing to tutor on the things that I do not understand” (NAO member, male, senior, Engineering major)
- (Positive Impact) “My involvement in [my organization] has given me the opportunity to know people in most of my classes. This way we can make study groups and help each other out in class” (NAO member, female, junior, Agriculture major)

**Personal Benefits Obtained from Organizational Relationships**

*Positive Impact*

- “My involvement with these organizations has had both positive and negative impacts on my academic performance, but overall, I think positive. Being involved with the organizations has allowed me to have a support system that has encouraged me at times when I sorely needed it; my major is very cutthroat, and other students will often say or do things that attempt to harm other people’s academics (i.e., tell you the test is on the wrong day, tell you wrong instructions for your experiments, make remarks like you know you really don’t have the characteristics to be a doctor, dentist, etc.)” (NAO member, female, junior, Science major)
- “If I were not connected to such a supportive and friendly group of people, I would not be motivated to work hard or prove myself against my peers. It is the friendly competition and positive pressure that give me a measure for my own success” (NAO member, female, junior, Education major)
- “When I am not really participating in anything, it is easy to feel alone and not care about studying as much” (NAO member, female, senior, Science major)

**Opportunities to Meet People and Make Friends**
Positive Impact

- “I have new friends that I go to games with and even sometimes study with, but the best part is simply making new friends” (NAO member, male, freshman, Business major)
- “I have made so many friends that will be dear to me the rest of my life” (NAO member, female, freshman, Education major)
- “It is just wonderful to meet new people” (NAO member, female, freshman, Veterinary Medicine major)

Theme 3: Time Management

The comments in this theme area illustrated that participants have differing views of time management and how it impacts academic performance. In one sub-theme, participants explained the overall impact of their organizations on time management. AO members offered a total of 35 comments, mostly in the “no impact” rating area, while NAO members offered a total of 68 comments which were evenly split between the three impact rating areas. The participants who thought time management issues in student organizations had a positive impact on their academic performance focused on how their commitments have forced them to better manage their time so they could get everything in. Those who rated the impact as negative explained that organizations took away time from their academic responsibilities. And the participants who rated organizations as having no impact on their academic performance said that they either spent minimal time in their organizational responsibilities or that they would direct their time to academics when it was necessary.

Another sub-theme demonstrates that participants prioritize how they spend their time. AO members offered 4 comments that described how their organizations had no impact on their academic performance because they choose academic responsibilities as their priority. NAO members were mixed in their thoughts about priorities. They offered 20 comments overall and were split between the no impact and positive impact categories. One member did explain that her priorities were the student organization and therefore had a negative impact on her academic performance.

The final sub-theme addressed how participants wanted to allocate their time to both academic and organization activities because each type of activity served a purpose. Most of the comments offered by both groups (3 from AO members, 15 from NAO members) explained how their organizations had a positive impact on the balance in their lives which, in turn, helped their academic performance. No participants in this sub-theme classified their organization involvement as having a negative impact.

Comments from each of the sub-themes and the corresponding impact ratings are provided below:

Organizational Impact on the Management of Time

Positive Impact

- “It keeps me busier, so I have to manage my time better to make sure I get all of my work accomplished” (AO member, female, senior, Agriculture major)
- “I don’t have enough time to procrastinate…” (NAO member, female, senior, Education major)
- “Being involved in other activities forces me to manage my time and schedule specific times for academic activities” (NAO member, male, junior, Engineering major)

Negative Impact

- “It takes time away from my studies. In other words, it takes away from my time that could be spent studying” (AO member, male, junior, Engineering major)
• “The amount of time I spend on other organizations definitely takes away time from my studies. However, it is well worth, and it very rarely, if ever, has a direct impact on my final letter grade in a class” (NAO member, female, senior, Business major)

• “Well it takes away time I could use to study and when I get back from practice I want to just rest when I should study but when I do I stay up late I am tired for class” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Science major)

• “I have found that school work really does not matter and that people who can best relate with each other are the most successful. My grades have taken a hit due to my involvement with my organization because of the importance I have placed on my education outside of the classroom” (NAO member, male, junior, Agriculture major)

No Impact

• “I don’t spend copious amounts of time with [the organization]” (AO member, female, junior, Liberal Arts major)

• “I only had to go to meetings twice a month, which did not have an impact on my performance at school” (AO member, female, senior, Agriculture major)

• “My involvement takes away time from my studies, but I am able to make up for that at other times so the net impact on my academic performance is 0” (AO member, female, senior, Business major)

• “My involvement is a huge time commitment but it has not affected my academic performance” (NAO member, female, senior, Agriculture major)

• “If I need to do something school related I don’t go, so it really isn’t being a drain on my academics” (NAO member, male, junior, Geosciences major)

Priorities

Positive Impact

• “The experiences have helped me get a good grasp on where my priorities lie” (NAO member, female, junior, Science major)

• “My involvement has helped [me] keep a sense of momentum—feeling like I always have things to do keeps me on top of my stuff” (NAO member, female, senior, Liberal Arts major)

Negative Impact

• “Do (sic) to my leadership responsibilities, I have not had enough time for studies” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Agriculture major)

No Impact

• “My involvement is voluntary, so if I feel there would be a better use of time, for example studying, I will do that instead” (AO member, female, sophomore, Veterinary Medicine major)

• “It doesn’t directly affect my grades because school comes first, but I decide how my grades will come out by my own decisions and performance” (NAO member, male, freshman, General Studies major)

• “If I need to study, it is ok to miss meetings and such. I choose which one I need to do” (NAO member, male, freshman, Geosciences major)

Balance

Positive Impact
• “It gives me a chance to relax with my peers and not be cooped up studying all the time” (AO member, female, junior, Education major)
• “If all I had to do was study then I would go crazy and never be motivated to study” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)
• “It gives a balance in my life so I am not constantly focusing on academics” (NAO member, male, senior, Engineering major)

**No Impact**
• “It just doesn’t. It is more like a pastime or hobby than an incentive” (NAO member, female, junior, Science major)
• “I make sure that I keep a good balance between my involvement in my organizations and my academic performance” (NAO member, female, sophomore, General Studies major)

**Theme 4: Personal Development**
Participants explained that being involved in organizations had a mostly positive impact on their personal development. Some participants said that organizations helped them achieve personal growth while others said it impacted their satisfaction with college life. In the personal growth area, NAO members offered 11 positive comments concerning the types of intangible rewards they gained from participating in their organizations such as spiritual development and maturity issues.

In terms of satisfaction, participants described how they felt inside because of their involvement in student organizations. AO members offered 4 comments that described how involvement made them happy. NAO members presented a total of 14 comments, most of which explained the happiness and enjoyment they received from their involvement. One person described how the organization’s attitude negatively impacted how he felt.

A few comments in both sub-themes and the impact ratings are included below:

**Personal Growth**

**Positive Impact**
• “Doing my activities has forced me to become a calmer person and has also made me thankful for what I’ve been provided” (NAO member, female, sophomore, Liberal Arts major)
• “My education through my student organization has been priceless. The value of networking, understanding people and team building are intangibles that I will be able to bring to the office place” (NAO member, male, junior, Agriculture major)
• “Growing in my Christian faith encourages me to excell (sic) in everything, including academics” (NAO member, female, senior, Liberal Arts major)

**Satisfaction**

**Positive Impact**
• “It adds an overall positive feeling which helps with school work” (AO member, female, freshman, Veterinary Medicine major)
• “I feel that I have come to enjoy my major a lot more by being involved in this organization” (AO member, female, freshman, Liberal Arts major)
• “I walk out of the meetings happy and satisfied with what I have. This makes me able to do my homework and other activities with a positive outlook and not a stressed out mind set” (NAO member, male, sophomore, Science major)
• “We help the community and it makes me feel better as a person knowing I can use my time to help those in need” (NAO member, female, junior, Education major)

Negative Impact
• “They make you feel like their organization is the most important thing in the world” (NAO member, male, junior, Liberal Arts major)

Theme 5: Learning

Participants addressed several areas of learning that they experienced due to their organizational involvement including academic field knowledge, skill building, and academic integration. AO members provided 31 comments, mostly positive, that explained how they were obtaining important academic field knowledge through their organizations. Some of their learning in this area centered on future career options, increased knowledge for classes, and what to expect when they graduated. A few members thought that the information they learned through their organizations had no impact on their academic performance because there was no direct application to the coursework.

Participants from both groups described new skills they picked up from their organizational involvement. AO members, who offered 10 comments, explained that they learned how to think for themselves, responsibility, and skills in general. NAO members, with 6 comments, said they learned about communication, networking, and skills in general. One member did not see a connection between the skills he picked up from his organization and his academic performance.

NAO members addressed the concept of academic integration when they described the link, or lack of one, between their organization involvement and their academic performance. The four comments explained that some participants used information they learned from student organizations to benefit their academic responsibilities while others did not use the knowledge in that context.

Some of the comments participants offered in each sub-theme area are provided below:

Field Knowledge
Positive Impact
• “Involvement has helped me decide what career path to take” (AO member, male, junior, Engineering major)
• “I am able to participate in class discussions based on what the speakers say to us at meetings” (AO member, female, junior, Education major)
• “I see how what I am learning is really used in the workforce, so it makes me want to learn more in my classes” (AO member, female, senior, Agriculture major)

No Impact
• “The organization that I am involved in has absolutely nothing to do with academics. It primarily discusses job opportunities and future plans encompassed by my major choice.” (AO member, female, freshman, Engineering)
• “It has no effect on how I do in my classes because the knowledge I gain from [the organization] is career based and not related to material in class” (AO member, female, junior, Engineering major)
• “I just don’t feel that the organization is giving me any extra knowledge about my chosen field, therefore it doesn’t really impact my academics” (AO member, female, senior, Liberal Arts major)

Skills
Positive Impact
• “It helps me to further develop my ideas and come up with new ones” (AO member, female, senior, Liberal Arts major)
• “It teaches me skills not necessary to perform well in the classroom, but instead in the real world” (AO member, female, freshman, Business major)
• “As a Public Relations officer in [my organization], I have learned a lot about communicating with other people, both verbally and written, which has had a positive impact on my studies for both my philosophy major and journalism minor” (NAO member, female, senior, Liberal Arts major)

No Impact
• “The skills I learn through my organization do not directly translate into skills applicable to my academic performance” (NAO member, male, sophomore, Engineering major)

Academic Integration
Positive Impact
• “I have served as the financial chair for my organization and it brought to light many of the different theories and skills I have studied in the classroom” (NAO member, male, senior, Business major)

No Impact
• “Only rarely do I use my knowledge gained from the organization in everyday class and assignments” (NAO member, female, senior, Liberal Arts major)

Limitations of This Study
First, females were over-represented in the respondent sample. Results may have varied if this group more accurately reflected the actual gender population. Second, the actual number of students in racial and ethnic groups was not statistically representative of the respective campus populations. For instance, African Americans represent 3% of the campus population and 1% of the respondent sample. In addition, the 1% in the respondent sample is only 7 students. Therefore, the results for different racial and ethnic groups were not reported. Third, the participants in the overall study had a higher overall grade point average than the undergraduate population on campus (3.007 versus 2.854). Furthermore, the participants of this specific examination of involvement had an even higher grade point average than the project sample (3.092). This may indicate that the sample over-represented students who were already in a high-achieving mode. Fourth, this survey relies mainly on self-reported data from students. As Pascarella (2001) noted, “Student self-reported gains represent a potentially useful and convenient alternative to more expensive and time-consuming standardized tests as a method for estimating the impact of college on students. The price to be paid for this convenience, however, is the need to take into account students’ precollege receptivity to educational experiences, as manifest in their disposition to report growth as the result of such experiences” (p. 491). This study did not attempt to measure precollege factors.
Conclusions and Recommendations
This study revealed that there are differences between academic and non-academic student organizations in terms of why students become involved, why they stay involved, and what kind of self-assessed impact that their experiences have on academic performance. Students who choose to become involved with academic student organizations do so because of a future focus. They want to learn more about their field, build their resumes, network with others in their field, and pursue professional development opportunities. They stay involved for many of those reasons but they also find personal enjoyment in the activities. Students who become involved with non-academic student organizations are motivated to do so for personal reasons that do not tie in to academic pursuits such as meeting people, pursuing hobbies and other personal interests, having fun, and taking a break from studying. They stay involved in those organizations because they accomplish the goals they had when they joined. They do make friends, enjoy themselves, and find passions outside of their academic work, all of which results in their persistence in the organizations.

For both types of organizations, students seem to learn similar skills overall. Students, regardless of what type of organization they joined, cited learning more about leadership, general business skills, time management, and interpersonal communication. The one difference this study discovered was that the students in academic organizations also cited acquired knowledge that is beneficial to their academic pursuits such as what academic resources are available to them, reinforcement of classroom concepts, and learning more about the opportunities in their chosen field.

In terms of academic impact of organizations, students seemed split between rating the impact as positive or indicating that there was no impact. Students in both types of organizations cited positive things their groups provided that assisted academic performance such as requiring good grades to become members, supporting or requiring study time, and meeting other students who could either help them study or provide them with advice on classes. Students in academic organizations mentioned additional benefits such as having a constant reminder of the future goals they were working towards, getting to know faculty and staff; and obtaining field knowledge that built upon the information provided in their courses. Students in non-academic organizations said they enjoyed their college lives more because they were able to meet people and make new friends in their groups and develop in a personal way (spiritual growth, maturity) because of their involvement.

Students in both organization types who said there was no impact on academic performance felt that way for three reasons: involvement and academic responsibilities are two separate things and do not cross-over; there is a minimal time commitment for the organizations so they do not interfere with academic performance; and academic responsibilities are always the priority and when there is a conflict, they will choose academics over organizations.

Some students did believe that involvement in organizations had a negative impact on academic performance. All but one of the reasons were shared between the two types of organizations. The shared reasons included involvement requiring a lot of time and energy that could be directed towards academic responsibilities and that organizations provided negative distractions. Students in non-academic student organizations introduced the idea that some faculty members were not supportive of students being involved in groups that were not focused on academic pursuits.

More research should be conducted on the differences between organization types to help uncover what kind of long-term benefits students gain from their involvement. Does involvement in one type
of organization lead to greater satisfaction with college life or does it only matter that students are involved with activities that interest them? Are there long-term benefits for students who are involved in academic organizations such as an increased opportunity of receiving job offers compared to students of the same major who were not involved in the organizations? Future research might also address how the different types of organizations assist in engaging students in college life as defined by Kuh et al. (2005) such as interaction with faculty outside the classroom and collaborative learning. It may also be useful to understand how faculty members perceive involvement in the different types of organizations.

Prepared by: Peggy Holzweiss
Prepared on: December 14, 2006

Special thanks goes to the qualitative data analysis team for their hard work and dedication over several months: Jennifer Boyle, Sandy Briers, Rhonda Rahn, Craig Rotter, Jacquie Vargas, and John Wickline.

Services provided by Student Life Studies are funded, in part, by Texas A&M Student Service Fees
References


