

# Sixty-Tips in Sixty Minutes

(Notes from Lyn Fiscus' portion of the CADA general session)

**Or... 60-60**

Make sure faculty members understand that research shows participation in activities positively affects student academic achievement.

A crucial first step in developing faculty support for student activities is to make sure faculty members understand that participation in activities has been shown to positively affect student achievement. A few points to share include:

- In results presented in the *Harvard Educational Review* in 2002, researchers Herbert Marsh and Sabina Kleitman found that joining more student activities and spending more time participating in them is associated with higher grades, more difficult courses selected, more time spent on homework, more colleges applied to, a higher likelihood of starting and finishing college, and a higher final degree earned.
- March and Kleitman also found that each additional hour per week spent on student activities leads to a 0.45 increase in GPA, 13 more minutes spent on homework per night, and .155 more university applications.
- In 2003, the *Journal of Adolescent Research* reported that student activity participation is linked to lower rates of dropping out of school, greater civic involvement, and higher levels of academic achievement. In addition, research tracking participation from eighth through twelfth grades and examining outcomes in the postsecondary years concluded that consistent participation has positive effects that last over a moderate length of time.
- Participation in student activities provides all students—including students from disadvantaged backgrounds, minorities, and those with otherwise less than distinguished academic achievements in high school—a measurable and meaningful gain in their college admissions test scores according to researchers Howard T. Everson and Roger E. Millsap, writing for the College Entrance Examination Board in 2005.
- Zill, Nord, & Loomis (1995) Found that 10<sup>th</sup> graders who did not participate in extracurricular activities were 57% more likely to drop out than students who participated between 1 to 4 hours a week.



Tie in with state standards in all curriculum areas.

Much of what students learn in activities reinforces other areas of the curriculum. A review of the standards in various curriculum areas reveals many areas of overlap. Participation in a student organization provides students with many opportunities to practice these academic skills. For example, according to standards adopted by the California State Board of Education for mathematics:

The goal in mathematics education is for students to:

- Develop fluency in basic computational skills.
- Develop an understanding of mathematical concepts.
- Become mathematical problem solvers who can recognize and solve routine problems readily and can find ways to reach a solution or goal where no routine path is apparent.
- Communicate precisely about quantities, logical relationships, and unknown values through the use of signs, symbols, models, graphs, and mathematical terms.
- Reason mathematically by gathering data, analyzing evidence, and building arguments to support or refute hypotheses.
- Make connections among mathematical ideas and between mathematics and other disciplines.

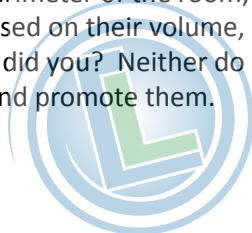
Schools that utilize these standards "enroll" students in a mathematical apprenticeship in which they practice skills, solve problems, apply mathematics to the real world, develop a capacity for abstract thinking, and ask and answer questions involving numbers or equations.

Problem solving involves applying skills, understanding, and experiences to resolve new or perplexing situations. It challenges students to apply their understanding of mathematical concepts in a new or complex situation, to exercise their computational and procedural skills, and to see mathematics as a way of finding answers to some of the problems that occur outside a classroom.

To get a little more specific, let's take just one of the math objectives:

- **8.0** Students know, derive, and solve problems involving the perimeter, circumference, area, volume, lateral area, and surface area of common geometric figures.

Think about the work involved by your student leaders in calculating how many decorations to order for a dance. They have to figure the size of the dance area, calculate how many rolls of streamers to buy based on the perimeter of the room, how many balloons it will take to fill a net suspended from the ceiling based on their volume, and so forth. Bet you never thought of dance decorations as a math lab, did you? Neither do your critics on the faculty, so it's up to you to make those connections and promote them.



Connect to the curriculum for some real-world practice of academic concepts.

National Center for Education Statistics (1995) reported that extracurricular activities “provide a channel for reinforcing the lessons learned in the classroom, applying academic skills in a real-world context, and thus must be considered part of a well-rounded education.”

During the planning stages of major activities, discuss with faculty members ways the upcoming activity can be incorporated into academic subjects. For example, a canned food drive can be integrated into curriculum in these ways:

- Language arts students could read books or articles about the homeless.
- Health classes or family and consumer science classes could review nutrition information and the effect on the body of undernourishment.
- Social studies classes could invite local government representatives to discuss relevant issues regarding hunger in the community. Students could research which local, state, and federal offices provide assistance.
- Math classes could help keep the tally of canned good collected and determine percentages of students participating, average number of cans per student, quantities of food from each food group, etc.
- World cultures class students could stage a simulation in the cafeteria with only a percentage of students receiving a full lunch, this percentage representing the number of people in the world who are adequately fed each day.
- Journalism students could write articles for the school newspaper that profile the agency being helped, with human-interest stories.
- Business students could visit the food pantry or organization to which the food is being donated to talk with staff members to find out the business side of keeping the agency going.
- Speech or drama classes could produce creative announcements encouraging participation in the food drive.
- Graphic design, marketing, or art classes could design fliers and posters to promote participation in the drive. Or design and produce a sticker to give each person who contributes to the drive—something like the “I voted” stickers poll workers give out.



Promote the idea that participation in student activities affects student development in many positive ways.

We talked about academic achievement, but activity involvement also has many positive social development aspects as well.

- Eccles, Barber, Stone & Hunt: 14-year study followed 1,259 students at various times in adolescence and young adulthood. They found that participation in structured extracurricular activities linked to both short and long term positive adolescent development. (2002)

Involvement at school predicted greater enjoyment of school, a higher GPA, greater likelihood of attending a full-time college, and graduating from college.

Conversely, their studies also showed that students less involved are more likely to participate in risky activities like using drugs, drinking alcohol, skipping school, and getting pregnant.

- In the Zill, Nord, & Loomis (1995) study mentioned earlier, they also found that 10<sup>th</sup> graders who did not participate in extracurricular activities 49% more likely to have used drugs and 37% more likely to become teen parents.

- Search Institute has identified 40 "developmental assets" that have a tremendous influence on young people's lives. The more of these assets young people have, the more likely they are to choose positive paths and grow up competent, caring, and responsible. Only 8% of youth in the Search Institute survey of 100,000 6–12<sup>th</sup> graders experiences at least 31 of the 40 assets; the average young person surveyed experiences only 18. The youth with the most assets are least likely to engage in the four most common high-risk behaviors among youth: problem alcohol use, illicit drug use, sexual activity, and violence. For example, only 6% of the students surveyed who experience 31–40 assets engage in violent behavior, compared to 61% of students experiencing 0–10 of the 40 developmental assets.

Involvement in activities can help students develop the assets they need to succeed:

Other adult relationships	Service to others	Positive peer influence
High expectations	Achievement motivation	School engagement
Bonding to school	Responsibility	Planning & decision making
Personal power	Sense of purpose	...and more!



Discuss the value of the life skills students learn in your program—with them, their parents, and other faculty members.

Teaching goal setting, project planning, communication skills, conflict resolution, time management, and the host of other skills needed to pull an event or program together isn't an easy task, but it is one that will benefit students for the rest of their lives.

• *Leadership in the Making*, research by the Kellogg Foundation that evaluated 31 leadership development programs serving high school and college aged youth, reports that 93% percent of the projects asserted their participants gained an increased sense of civic/social/political awareness. Other outcomes reported by at least one-half of the projects included:

- Increased commitment to service and volunteerism (86%)
- Improved communication skills (85%)
- A higher sense of personal and social responsibility (79%)
- An increased sense of civic/social/ political efficacy (79%)
- Improved self-esteem (74%)
- Improved problem-solving ability (73%)
- Increased civic/social/political activity (70%)
- An increased sense of being galvanized for action (67%)
- An increased desire for change (62%)
- Improved ability to vision (57%)
- Improved ability to be issue-focused (54%)
- Improved conflict resolution skills (54%)
- Improved likelihood of sharing power (52%)
- Improved interaction with faculty (50%)

The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills has developed a unified, collective vision for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning that will make high schools more meaningful, engaging, and relevant. Many of these elements can be found in activity programs & student leadership classes.

Among the six key elements of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning:

Learning and thinking skills comprised of:

- Critical-thinking and problem-solving skills
- Communication skills
- Creativity and innovation skills
- Collaboration skills
- Contextual learning skills
- Information and media literacy skills



Be conscious of your “brand.”

How many of you have a public relations program? (show of hands) Well guess what—whether you think you do or not, you relate to your various publics, so you have “public relations.”

Everything you do conveys a message to the public about your group: a sloppily painted poster with a misspelled word sends a negative image of your organization; a successful, well-organized event sends a positive image; lack of communication with those who need to know about your plans creates frustration and a negative image; following up an event with thank you notes to those who helped builds a positive image. Instead of sending haphazard, possibly even negative messages, give careful attention to sending positive messages and building the image you want your group to have.

Concentrate on each of the various groups you interact with: students, faculty & staff, administration, school board, parents, community.

Demonstrate the reach of your program by gathering data on the number of students who participate in your events, activities, and programs and publishing that information. (Tell the story of the advisor in Oregon who kept records on attendance and showed that attendance spiked on days they had activities.)



Lyn #7 Justifying Your Program

Realize that what you are doing  
is incredibly significant  
in the lives of students.

It's easy to get caught up in the frenzy and fun of student activities, and to forget that there's more to it than that. But I believe that students who participate in this type of learning experience gain confidence and leadership skills that will affect their future every bit as much as what they learn in a classroom.

*[Tell the story of Pat and ask for a show of hands of people who have a similar story they could tell. ]*

What you are doing is incredibly significant in the lives of students—all students on campus, but especially those with whom you interact regularly.



# Lyn Fiscus

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Lyn Fiscus, former leadership teacher and activity adviser, is CEO of Leadership Logistics, which supports positive youth development. She also serves as vice president of the Alliance for Student Activities, is the creator of the Leadership Teacher website, and is author of several student activities books including the *Adviser's Guide to Student Activities* and *The Bucks Start Here: Fundraising for Student Activities* with Earl Reum. She was the national recipient of the 2005 Earl Reum Award, in recognition of outstanding leadership and commitment to the promotion of excellence in student activities. She and Sandi started as activities directors at the same Missouri school.



## For further reading...

- Issues of *The Advocate* by the Alliance for Student Activities; available online at [www.alliance4studentactivities.org](http://www.alliance4studentactivities.org)
- *The Role of School-Based Extracurricular Activities in Adolescent Development: A Comprehensive Review and Future Directions*, by Amy F. Feldman and Jennifer L. Matjasko available online at
- <http://rer.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/75/2/159>

