



The Effects of Test Anxiety and Extracurricular Involvement Across Different Student Groups

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Abstract

NCAA Division III educational institutions promote a student-first philosophy that recognizes participation in athletics as one component of a well-rounded college experience prioritizing academic excellence. However, there is limited research on the academic stress and time management skills among students participating in Division III athletics and other time-consuming, structured extracurricular activities. This study investigated whether students participating in Division III athletics and performing arts at a small liberal arts college reported lower test anxiety than peers in less-structured clubs or with no extracurricular involvement, whether their level of test anxiety was influenced by the number of hours they spent on their extracurriculars, and whether their time management skills explained why their structured involvement might help lessen test anxiety

Methods

Participants in this study consist of undergraduate college students ages 18-25 who are all current, full-time students at The College of Wooster. Wooster offers NCAA division III athletics, performing arts and over 120 student organizations. The sample size of this study is 109 students. There are 56 student athletes, 21 students involved in performative arts (theatre, dance, debate teams), 23 students who are active participants in organized clubs and 5 students who are not engaged in any sort of organized extracurricular activities. The participants for this study were recruited through mass emails, Scots connect, word of mouth and posters advertising the study around campus

Results

The present study set out to determine whether extracurricular involvement type confers a measurable advantage in managing test anxiety at a liberal arts institution. The answer is that group membership alone does not. Athletes matched club members in test anxiety despite absorbing dramatically greater time demands, a finding that speaks to the psychological usefulness of the NCAA Division III student-first model and suggests that the structure this model provides to students may genuinely protect well-being in the academic domain. At the same time, the one significant group difference that did emerge was not the one the study predicted: performing arts students showed the highest anxiety in the sample, raising important questions about whether and how structured involvement in evaluative performance contexts may amplify the academic anxiety it was hypothesized to reduce. Neither the type of extracurricular involvement, the hours devoted to it, nor the time management skills it was expected to build predicted test anxiety in a consistent or meaningful way.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research question 1: Do extracurricular groups exhibit different levels of test anxiety? Research question two: To what extent do academic workloads, athletic competition schedules, and club commitments contribute to test anxiety levels? Research question three: How do time management skills, social support systems and coping strategies differ among groups, influencing test anxiety and stress management?

Hypothesis 1: Extracurricular involvement type will be associated with test anxiety levels, such that students in structured activities (athletes, performing arts) report lower test anxiety than those in less structured activities (clubs) or non-participants. Hypothesis 2: The relationship between extracurricular time commitment and test anxiety will be moderated by involvement type, such that higher time commitment is associated with lower anxiety for athletes and performing arts students, but higher anxiety for club members and non-participants Hypothesis 3: Time management skills will mediate the relationship between structured extracurricular involvement (athletes and performing arts) and lower test anxiety levels.

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Test Anxiety (WTAS)	—			
2. Time Management (TMQ)	.006	—		
3. Perceived Stress/Control (PSS)	-.537**	.012	—	
4. Weekly Hours	-.043	.064	-.086	—

