

# EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

## *Not Just Frills!*

By Ricky E. Williams

am! Bam! Bam! The gavel pounded purposefully against the cafeteria table.

Jason, the student-body president, peered intently around the room as the senate came to order. He noted the mood of the various senators and wondered how they would respond to his opening remarks.

From across the room Susan hol-

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lered, "Oh, Jason, quit taking yourself so seriously! You would think from looking at you that what you are about to say might even be important!" Laughter escaped from several spots while other students glowered disapprovingly and one shot back, "It *is* important, and if you don't think so just leave!"

A similar scenario occurs year after year in many institutions. Is the student senate just play? Does it have a purpose beyond keeping students busy revising the constitution so that they will not be creat-

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president of the college men's club had contributed significantly to the success of his work with the building committee. Understanding when to delegate segments of the task to various subcommittees came from skills he had learned while leading out in the men's club activities.

John Dewey, the pragmatist, would have been delighted to hear a young woman relate how she learned to administer her departmental meetings. With a twinkle in her eye, she acknowledged, "I had a hard time remembering what I was taught in a class if it seemed too abstract or unrelated to what I would be doing in real life. I vaguely remember hearing about parliamentary procedure somewhere along the line. But I really learned it as president of the student association. Now when I chair my departmental meetings and someone raises a question about order I can usually get it right because of those student leadership experiences. In college I never really pictured myself in my current role, so I am exceedingly appreciative that I have those experiences to fall back on."

Time and again as I conducted interviews, I heard about individu-

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als' having unconsciously picked up important life-skills while participating in extracurricular activities. From listening to their accounts of nonintentional learning, I began to see that we, as educators, may be missing tremendous opportunities to enhance the education of our students.

Popular psychology constantly pummels us with the idea that we can "have it all." This concept appears everywhere—from alcoholic beverage advertising, which advises that "you only go around once in life, so grab for the gusto," to automobile ads that encourage you to buy a particular car to show people that you *already* have it all.

Although warped and taken to extremes, Madison Avenue's idea of "having it all" basically has validity. God has given each of us many talents that should be developed. No curriculum in any school can do that. We need extracurricular activities to help us discover and develop the full range of these talents.

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ing other problems for the college or university?

At first glance, both students and faculty often think that it is not "for real," but a little thought shows that extracurricular activities serve a necessary function for our church and educational system.

### **Practice for Real Life**

In gathering information for this article, I spoke with a young physician who recently chaired the building committee for his church. He emphatically described the many ways in which his term as

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### **Why Offer Extracurricular Activities?**

Colleges need to offer cocurricular opportunities because today's students are tomorrow's future leaders of church and society. Learning by doing alongside leaders with experience will prepare young people for life.

In my own experience, working with a residence hall dean reinforced my commitment to the work ethic and taught me important lessons. The dean and I discussed various men's club projects as we scrubbed black marks off the linoleum in the dorm. I will always remember this powerful witness of his willingness to do any kind of work with us. At the same time, he demonstrated how to delegate tasks, how to meet deadlines, and how to find dependable people to assist in projects. I learned what it meant to count on someone and to be counted on, and I learned about life. This experience helped me decide the kind of person I wanted to become.

### **What Is Extracurricular Anyway?**

Some people would argue that the last example dealt with a work program, not an extracurricular activity. How should extracurricular activities be defined?

I asked many people what extracurricular activities they remembered from their academic experience and what impact these events had had on them. I received an impressive range of responses, underscoring the fact that people define extracurricular activities in different ways.

### **Seminars**

Many people mentioned seminars as memorable extracurricular events. For instance, years later, two people remembered attending seminars dealing with finance, budgeting, and the signing of contracts. Conducted in a residence hall, these sessions were open to

the general student population.

For at least one person, the seminar was the only financial planning information he ever received while attending school. Although colleges offer a variety of business classes, few liberal arts or science majors enroll in such courses.

### **Clubs**

Many people reported involvement in club activities. Interestingly, they cited opposite reasons for joining. Some said they wanted the opportunity to meet students with similar goals and backgrounds. These might have chosen a physics or literature club.

Others stated that they wanted to meet students with different goals and backgrounds, so they joined an ethnic club. Both groups believed that meeting people in a semi-nonacademic setting was helpful in forming friendships.

A few years ago a student who attended college in order to find a marriage partner might have been ridiculed. Today it seems more difficult to find people with similar values to share one's life. Extracurricular activities can make a real contribution in this area. One fellow remarked that if he spent \$40,000 to go to college just to find the right mate, it would have been

worth it. Club activities encourage relaxed student interaction, which allows young people to cultivate friendships that develop into mutual respect and love.

Social activities rated high on the list of remembered activities from college. Disneyland, Six-Flags amusement park trips, baseball games, banquets, hayrides, and picnics headed the list. Many people could remember particular individuals with whom they had gone to these events, people who had become lifelong friends.

### **Famous Speakers**

Other respondents to my survey remembered notable speakers at assemblies or seminars. One woman administrator who had served as a student hostess for a congressman recalled, "When I think about what that meant to me I am deeply grateful. The administrators could have filled all the congressman's time, but instead they had the good sense to let us students gain the experience of interacting with people at the national level. You can't imagine how much that did for my self-esteem. I began to believe that I could deal with people in the real world and that I had nothing to be afraid of."

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## Research Presentations

Having your professors include you when they presented research at a convention also gained high marks. This seemed to contribute to the confidence these students had about themselves. Many of them later became professors themselves.

## Creating Memories

The extracurricular activities listed above truly created memories. In fact, creating memories is a significant contribution of campus activities that occur outside the classroom.

When I asked one fellow to describe the advantages of extracurricular activities, he queried back, "Can you remember what you were doing in chemistry class on April 11, 1965?" I acknowledged that I could not.

He continued, "See, you forget the mundane—even though it's necessary—but you remember the special events. If you had had a chemistry fair at your school you would have remembered it." He admitted that one can't learn everything through special events. But that was not his point. He believed that creating memories required special events.

I think he is right. Recently at the 20th anniversary of my academy graduation, my wife and I took our children back to our alma mater for the first time. While I occasionally had to remind my children to pay attention to where I had sat in class, I noticed that both they and I showed the most enthusiasm when we discussed special events.

For example, I recalled, "This is where we boys' club officers brought the new Shelby Cobra through the window into the cafeteria for the car show and almost dropped it off the window sill!"

Until that show we had had no idea that our physical plant manager was a real person who cared about cars and about our interests.

It was his masterminding that ensured the project's success.

This story points up another advantage of extracurricular activities—students get to see administrators, faculty, and staff as real people, involved in areas of personal interest to them.

## Who's in Charge?

Thinking about dropping cars off of ledges brings up the topic of who is responsible for extracurricular activities and how they should be coordinated and controlled. What kind of guidelines should be developed? While hundreds of pages could be written to address the entire scope of activities, a few points stand out.

Over the course of the year nearly every faculty member, department, and organization will be involved in creating special events. Therefore a committee, or perhaps several committees, should be appointed to coordinate these activities. For example, the student life committee could make a yearly calendar of events for club activities and nonacademic events. This committee could work with the academic affairs committee to schedule overlapping events, such as a music symposium.

These or other committees should assign the planning of extracurricular events. Each department could be given a major event to sponsor sometime during the year, perhaps on a rotating basis. If special events are planned in the spring, then the summer can be used for developing ideas and resources.

## Providing a Well-Balanced Education

Committees should pay special attention to "rounding out" the students' education. One way to do this is to organize a year or a semester around themes, such as the year of the Olympics or the national theme for the year (Year of the Child or Year of the Handicapped). An institution's birthday can offer an organizational rallying point. Events can be scheduled to highlight the themes of important books or current events.

## Developing Guidelines

Each group concerned with extracurricular activities should develop specific criteria to define what is appropriate for a Seventh-day Adventist campus. One professor, commenting on this issue, said that Paul's advice always stands him in pretty good stead:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8, NIV).\*

It is always difficult to know how much of "the world" one should incorporate into our educational package. Sometimes we look at the example of the Israelites and feel we should have little involvement with the outside world. Other times we see the importance of being in the world but not of the world.

One professor suggested that it is often how an event is done, not what is done that makes the difference. If, for example, the school schedules a national speaker who has some controversial ideas, the manner in which the event is conducted can present a statement about what we believe.

Faculty and administrators can schedule discussion groups prior to such events to address topics likely to be raised by the speaker. These issues may include points critical to Adventist philosophy. However, a casual invitation without the appropriate preparation can suggest that we condone the speaker's ideas.

When students see, through being a part of the planning, how the difficult issues are handled, they will gain an insight into the importance of both our church's and civilization's values and traditions.

Extracurricular activities therefore offer a laboratory for the philosophy and attitudes that we so carefully present in the classroom. Are they an extra? Perhaps, but we need to have it all! □

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