**Abstract**

The body of research that focuses on students in the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) is limited, but the existing research shows that CAMP students, despite entering the university facing threats to their academic success, still reach higher academic achievement than their same year peers. This research uses secondary data and interviews to compare the level of extracurricular engagement of CAMP students to non-CAMP students at a metropolitan state university in Northern California. The present study examines the possible influence of non-CAMP extracurricular activities on the success of these students.

In the United States and in many other places in the world, success and attainment are measured by level of education. While the number of Latinos enrolling in institutions of higher education has increased, it remains a small portion of the total enrollment (Chapa 2004). The small percentage of Latinos who do pursue higher education often are faced with more challenges than their peers. Research suggests that “for Latino students, academic readiness is only one component that is necessary for a successful collegiate experience” (Mina 2004, 79).

The federally funded College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) is an example of a support program that helps many students accomplish their educational goals. Data shows that since 2000, the CAMP program at the California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) has served about three percent of all incoming first-time freshmen each year, the majority of whom are Latino. The program offers pre-college transition to college and first-year support services that help the students graduate (College Assistance Migrant Program 2008).

Studies consistently show that students benefit both academically and politically from being engaged in extracurricular activities; however there has
been no research that focuses on the level of extracurricular engagement of students in CAMP. Comparing the level of extracurricular engagement of CAMP students and their academic achievement to the general CSUS student population will provide insights into whether participation in extracurricular activities is beneficial to this group of students as well. Having these answers will help clarify the role of increasing engagement of students in extracurricular activities on academic achievement.

After examining literature and previous studies on student participation in extracurricular activities, it became apparent that the existing literature does not yet cover specific groups of students. Therefore, interest in the role that extracurricular participation has on a group of university students was the motivation for this research. The purpose of this research is to examine the possible role that extracurricular activities plays for students in the College Assistance Migrant Program at California State University, Sacramento. This study attempts to answer the following two questions: 1) Do CAMP students participate more or less in extracurricular activities than other students who entered the university in the same year? 2) What relationship exists between participation in extracurricular activities and the educational success of students in the CAMP program? Having answers to these questions may help researchers better understand the extent to which engagement in extracurricular activities helps CAMP students succeed academically at the university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The United States is one of the most diverse countries in the world. The diversity can be seen through the demographics of many public schools in this country, especially in California. However, in the education system there is a discrepancy in academic achievement among different ethnic groups of students. Hispanics, for example, fall behind their non-Hispanic peers in academics (Gary 2008). This discrepancy, which is often present since early childhood, also persists in higher education. Statistics show that, even though the percentage of Latinos attending institutions of higher education in the United States has increased, they still make “less than 10% of total enrollments in 2-year, 4-year, and graduate institutions” (Chapa 2004, 142) even though they make up 17% of the 18-24 year old population (U.S. Census Bureau 2008).

Among the group of Latinos are migrant students who face additional obstacles in their educational pursuit. Migrant students move from school to school during the year as they follow their parents’ pursuit of seasonal work (California Ed. Code 2008, Section 54440). Even though not all
migrant students are Latinos, the great majority of the migrant students (or their parents) are from Mexico (Gibson 2002). During their K-12 education, migrant students face serious obstacles because migrant students “tend to move frequently, attend school irregularly, and suffer health defects and language handicaps which significantly inhibit their progress in school” (California Ed. Code 2008, Section 54440).

However, many migrant students have great potential and many are very determined to advance their education. Migrant students can be successful if they receive the help they need to overcome the extra barriers that they face as migrant students. Common factors shared by migrant students (including limited parental education, learning English as a second language and living below the poverty level) can cause migrant students to fall behind their peers in academics. Another factor that creates a much greater hardship in the education of migrant students is their frequent mobility (Gibson 2002). Following seasonal work often results in families moving more than once a year from state to state or within different school districts of a state. Other migrant families migrate interchangeably between Mexico and the United States, staying part of the year in Mexico and part of the year in the United States (Gibson 2002). The impact on the migrant student is that each move represents the need to adapt to a new school, to changing academic expectations, and to new teachers and peers. Furthermore, migrant students are absent from school between the moves and during the enrollment process.

These disadvantages often hinder migrant students’ eligibility to enter a post-secondary education. Those who do enroll in an institution of higher education are perhaps not as likely to continue moving with their family following seasonal work because attending a university requires the student to be more stable. For the less than 10 percent of Latinos who transition into a college or university, “academic readiness is only one component that is necessary for a successful collegiate experience” (Mina 2004, 79). For these students, other factors like family, community, peers, and the institution that they attend play an important role in their educational experience (Mina 2004).

Some students of migrant background have the benefit of attending institutions of higher education that offer CAMP, in which they may enroll. There are eight higher education institutions in California offering CAMP (Santiago Canyon College 2008). CAMP is a federally funded program that “assists students who are migratory or seasonal farm workers (or children of such workers) enrolled in their first year of undergraduate studies” (U.S.
Each year CAMP serves about 2,000 students in the United States (U.S. Dept. of Education 2009). One of the institutions offering CAMP is CSUS. At CSUS, CAMP helps freshmen “make the transition to college life during their first year at Sacramento State and assists them in developing the skills needed to stay and successfully graduate from the university” (OIR CAMP Assessment Report 2008). A study done by the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) at CSUS shows that CAMP participants usually enter CSUS with lower high school grade point averages (GPAs) and lower Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores than the rest of the first-time freshmen cohort. However, after their first year in college, CAMP participants obtain a higher average GPA than the general CSUS first-time freshmen cohort. Furthermore, a higher percentage of CAMP participants are in good academic standing after their first year in college. For example, in the 2007 cohort, 88% of CAMP participants were in good academic standing compared to 76% of the rest of the 2007 CSUS cohort students who were not in an equity program (OIR CAMP Assessment Report 2008). The report also shows that from 2001 to 2007, the retention rates for first to second year CAMP students were significantly higher than other first-time freshmen groups. The conclusion of the OIR report regarding the CAMP programs is that “it is quite apparent that this program is providing significant assistance to its students” (OIR CAMP Assessment Report 2008).

The CSUS OIR also analyzed the relationship between participating in extracurricular activities and the academic performance of CSUS students. After reviewing literature that showed that extracurricular activities had a positive impact on students’ academics, OIR decided to conduct research to see if this positive relationship was also true of CSUS students who were involved in extracurricular activities (Office of Institutional Research 2009). Much of the literature reviewed for the OIR study also showed the positive relationship between participating in extracurricular activities and the academic success of students. The literature shows that at the high school level, in some cases, extracurricular activities have negative or no effect on academic achievement. In this setting, the negative relationship between extracurricular activities and academic achievement results when the student’s school does not sponsor the activities. A negative relationship can also exist when the student engages in so many extracurricular activities that they distract the student from focusing on academics (Gilman, Meyers, and Perez 2004). However, most research indicates that participation in extracurricular activities at the high school level helps students increase their academic achievement. Extracurricular activities, especially sports and fine arts, help the
student stay engaged in school (McNeal 1995). Extracurricular activities also increase a sense of connection to the student’s school, and can be especially beneficial to those students who are at risk of dropping out of school due to disengagement. Engagement in extracurricular activities is beneficial because it provides the student with positive experiences and an increase in school satisfaction (Gilman, Meyers, and Perez 2004).

The literature also shows that a similar relationship between extracurricular activities and academic achievement exists in institutions of higher education. Research shows that civic engagement can also increase the student’s learning during her or his undergraduate studies (Chapa 2004). Extensive research has been conducted by George D. Kuh, Chancellors’ Professor of Higher Education at Indiana University, director of the Center for Postsecondary Research and founder of the National Survey for Student Engagement. Kuh has conducted research focused on the many ways of encouraging student learning. One particular study conducted by Kuh focuses on the relationship between participating in extracurricular activities and the grades and persistence of students. This study concluded two very important findings. One of the findings was that “student engagement in educationally purposeful activities is positively related to academic outcomes” (Kuh 2008, 555). Kuh also found that “engagement has a compensatory effect on first-year grades and persistence to the second year of college at the same institution” (2008, 555). This finding is relevant to the present study since Kuh states that engagement is especially important to help students who start school with risk factors such as “being academically under-prepared, or first in their families to go to college or from low income backgrounds” (2008, 555), which are all categories that apply to most CAMP participants when they begin college.

However, there has not been much research that compares CAMP student engagement in extracurricular activities to the general student population at CSUS. The previously discussed OIR study already shows that the retention rates and academic achievement of CAMP participants is higher than other students of the same year (OIR CAMP Assessment Report 2008). It is important to now explore whether the academic achievement of the CAMP students is related to their engagement in extracurricular activities. It is also important to analyze if CAMP should focus on engaging its students in extracurricular activities that will foster a better sense of connection with their school.
To make a comparison between CAMP students and their peers at CSUS, two types of methods were used in this research. A qualitative approach (in-depth interview) was used to gain a more insightful view of the experiences of CAMP students in regards to participation in extracurricular activities. A quantitative method was used to compare the level of extracurricular activity participation of CAMP students with the level of non-migrant students at CSUS.

Qualitative Interview: Process and Selection
Before the interviews were conducted, the researcher obtained human subjects approval from the CSUS Department of Public Policy and Administration. The pool of interviewees for this research included students who were enrolled in CAMP during their first year at CSUS between the years 2004 and 2007. Eight of the participants for the interviews were selected through a process of simple random sampling. The random sample was taken from a list of the students enrolled in the CAMP program provided by the CAMP director. The list separated the students by the year in which they entered the program as first-time freshmen. For each year, the students were listed in alphabetical order by last name and the random sample was taken from this list. A random list of students was created but only two individuals from each year were interviewed. Four separate random samples were conducted to select students from each year using the same process. The list included students from academic years 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008. These years were selected for two reasons: (1) These are the years used in the comparison OIR research; and (2) Most of the students in these cohorts are still enrolled at CSUS, which allows for possible beneficial feedback from the most current students. It was also the most accessible method for this study because participants are likely to live relatively local in relation to the CSUS campus.

The two individuals from each year were selected using the same process described previously. Starting at the top of the list of names selected by running the random sample, the students were called at the telephone numbers provided by the CAMP office. The researcher selected the first two students to interview who met the following criteria: 1) contact is made; 2) the student is still enrolled in or has graduated from CSUS; and 3) the student can meet at a date, time and location accessible to both the participant and the researcher. Also, the interviewees had to have been enrolled in CAMP as a freshmen/first-year college student at CSUS between the years 2004 and 2007.
Eight other CAMP students were selected to participate in interviews for this study. Once again, the two participants from each year from 2004 to 2007 were selected. This time the participants were selected based on a non-random basis. The researcher asked the CAMP staff for the recommendation of students who had been active in extracurricular activities and in their campus community. The researcher decided to interview eight other CAMP students selected on a non-random basis to create a larger sample with a better chance of being representative of the experiences of CAMP students. There would have been a high likelihood that the two students selected from each year both were not active in extracurricular activities, and, therefore, not representative of the experiences of those who do participate. The eight participants selected based on the recommendation by CAMP staff were asked the same interview questions as the other participants, but were also questioned to obtain a knowledge of some factors that contribute to positive educational experiences. The interviews were conducted after the participants read and signed the consent form provided by the researcher. Given the consent of the participant, the interviews were audio-recorded to then be transcribed.

Qualitative Method
The first method consists of a qualitative analysis of the testimonies of CAMP students interviewed. This qualitative analysis is used to examine individual experiences of CAMP students in regards to their participation in extracurricular activities. The goal of this method is to examine the students’ perspectives on participating in extracurricular activities and the positive or negative impact that it has/had on their experiences as students. The participants were asked if they had participated in any extracurricular activity during their college career at CSUS. They were told that for the purpose of this research, extracurricular activities could include student body government board membership, being a residence hall associate, an orientation leader, or a student club participant. If the students answered ‘yes’ to this question, they were then asked the following questions:

1. How did you become involved in these extracurricular activities?
2. Do you believe that participating in these extracurricular activities has or has not had an impact on your educational success? Why?
3. Can you describe a situation in which you believe being part of an extracurricular activity helped you overcome a difficult situation?

The answers to these questions illustrate the ways in which participation in such activities is beneficial to the students and the ways in which participation might be a disadvantage. Participants who said that they do not or did not
participate in extracurricular activities were asked the following question: Is there a reason why you did not participate? This question illustrates any contributing factors that prevent students from participating in extracurricular activities or if non-participation is voluntary.

Quantitative Method
The second method consists of collecting quantitative data that was useful to make a comparison between the levels of engagement of CAMP students in extracurricular activities with the level of engagement of non-CAMP students at CSUS. The quantitative data was collected in two forms. Some quantitative data was collected from the interviews conducted. Another form of quantitative data was secondary data provided by the CSUS OIR. CAMP contributed to the research by providing the OIR with the student identification numbers of students enrolled in the CAMP program in freshmen cohorts 2004 to 2007. Once the OIR received this data, it was then examined to find out how many of the participants in extracurricular activities at CSUS are CAMP students. The ratio of CAMP participants in extracurricular activities was compared to the ratio of non-CAMP participants in extracurricular activities to see if the level of participation of CAMP students is higher or lower than their non-CAMP CSUS peers.

RESULTS
Interviews were scheduled and conducted from June 11, 2009 to June 17, 2009. The interviews were conducted at locations that were the most accessible to the participant and that the researcher could accommodate. Most of the interviews took place at the CSUS campus, but some were conducted at local coffee shops, the researcher’s home and one was held at a student’s home. All of the interview participants gave their consent to have the interview audio-recorded. The researcher was able to take brief notes during the interviews and then used the audio recordings to complete the interview notes. Figure 1 shows the results of interview questions with “yes” and “no” answers. The first bar to each question represents the number of participants who answered “no” to the question. The second bar represents the number of participants who answered “yes” to the question.

Figure 2 shows the results for a set of interview questions where the participants were asked to use the scale to respond to the questions. The results show that the participants do not generally engage in discussions about politics at home, but most do attend campus events and activities “quite a bit.” Furthermore, these results show that most participants feel that CAMP emphasizes attending campus events and activities more than their institution does. Furthermore, the results displayed in Figure 2 show
that most participants feel “quite a bit” or “very much” connected to their campus.

![Figure 1](image1.png)

**Figure 1.** “Yes” and “No” answers to interview questions.

![Figure 2](image2.png)

**Figure 2.** Interview question results.

In addition to the questions shown in the figures, interview participants were asked about their parents’ highest level of education. The answer options were: 1) some high school; 2) graduated from high school; 3) some college; 4) completed a 4-year college degree; or 5) completed a professional degree. Because the parents of many interview participants did not complete their education beyond the elementary level, they did not fit into any of the categories. Therefore, for the purpose of the analysis, another category, “did not reach high school” was created to measure the number of participants
whose parents did not go to school beyond elementary school. In fact, the students interviewed are the first generation in their families to attend college and therefore neither parent of the students has attended college. Fourteen out of sixteen mothers of the participants did not reach high school and only one of the two who did attend actually graduated from high school. Thirteen out of sixteen participants’ fathers did not reach high school and again only one of the three who attended high school graduated.

Qualitative Results
When interview participants were asked if they participated in an extracurricular activity as defined by the researcher, participants who answered “yes” were asked if they believed that participating in these extracurricular activities has or has not had an impact on their educational success. This open-ended question was one of the most important interview questions. In general, most participants answered that extracurricular activities does have an impact in their educational success. While it would be difficult to explain the testimony of each interview participant on why extracurricular activities has had an impact on their education success, the following is an example of what was shared by one of the interview participants:

There is always positives and negatives. The negative is that you put more time in extracurricular activities and organizations that minimizes your time to study. There is always the positive that is that you develop what they call the soft skills and being able to demonstrate through extracurricular activities that you are able to handle a lot of things and be balanced.

This testimony, the most representative of how most participants responded, included both arguments. From the testimonies of the participants it can be concluded that engagement in extracurricular activities can be both beneficial and distracting to the education of CAMP students. This finding is similar to what previous studies have shown about students in general. However, the results of the present study show that even though there might be some negatives, the benefits of CAMP students being engaged in extracurricular activities outweigh the negatives.

Students who are participants in extracurricular activities were also asked if they could describe a situation in which they believe being part of an extracurricular activity helped them overcome a difficult situation. This question was difficult for the participants to answer. Most of the participants said that they believed that being part of organizations has helped them; however it was difficult to remember a particular situation. One of the
students, however, shared that, “Yes. It helped overcome the fear of actually going out there… you get that fear of not know if you can make it because you are afraid that you are going to fail, and when you actually get out there and get involved you build more confidence.”

Those students who said that they did not participate in extracurricular activities during their college career were asked if there was a reason why they did not participate. The answer was that they were involved in other activities that are not considered extracurricular activities as defined by the present study.

Secondary Data Results
The results include data for freshmen cohorts from 2004 to 2007. Table 1 shows the results for the rate of participation of students in CAMP, for Hispanic students not in CAMP and all other freshmen at CSUS. Students were considered participants of an extracurricular activity if they were part of student body government board membership, were a residence hall associate, an orientation leader, or a student club participant. An overall extracurricular activity participation ratio of 9.7% was found for CAMP students versus 5.2% for all other CSUS freshmen. It also shows that CAMP students participate in extracurricular activities at a higher rate than other Hispanic students at CSUS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CAMP</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>All Freshmen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>9549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
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Table 1. Rates of participation.

**Analysis**

After gathering the data and conducting interviews, a pattern was observed by the researcher. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of the lives of CAMP students was obtained from each individual interview. Students shared their level of engagement in extracurricular activities and the impact that participating or not participating has had in their educational career.

The researcher observed that the students who were very involved in school and community were also the students who expressed a positive connection with CAMP. Many of the students shared that they were encouraged by
CAMP staff and alumni to participate and be active in extracurricular activities and events.

Based on the data collected by OIR, CAMP students have a higher rate of participation in extracurricular activities than non-CAMP freshmen cohorts from 2004 to 2007. The data also shows that CAMP students have a higher rate of participation than other Hispanic freshmen in the same year cohorts. The population and rate of participation of each group is outlined in Table 1. The data also shows that most of the students are engaged in clubs rather than other extracurricular activities. As mentioned in the literature review, a report on CAMP conducted by the OIR found that, on average, CAMP students have a higher GPA than the rest of the students at CSUS. Furthermore, all the CAMP students interviewed have a 2.5 or better GPA. When the participants involved in extracurricular activities were asked if they believed that participating in extracurricular activities did or did not have an impact on their educational success, the majority said that participating did have a positive impact on their educational success. Some participants said that even though being involved in extracurricular activities takes time, there are numerous ways in which participating is beneficial. Most of the students who were participants in extracurricular activities also had jobs, but many interviewees expressed that being involved helped them with their time management. Being involved also helped the students stay focused in their studies if they wanted to have time to participate in other activities.

LIMITATIONS

One of the limitations of this research is that the secondary data used does not include participation rates for students after the first year of college. The data collected by OIR shows the participation rates for freshmen only, and this research does not take into account that perhaps more students join an extracurricular activity after their first year once they are more acquainted with college. It is also possible that after the first year students become busy with other tasks that leave less time for extracurricular activities, resulting in a lower rate of participation. However, to be able to compare CAMP students to other CSUS students, it is necessary to make a comparison among the same grade level of students. Therefore, this limitation leaves room for further research that focuses on whether students participate in extracurricular activities more or less after their first year in college.

Another limitation in the present study is that it is based on a single campus using a small data sample so the research can not generalize too far. It is possible that there are other factors not taken into account in the present research that may play a role in the academic achievement of the CAMP
students. However, the present study sets a foundation to focus on this student population and expand on the current research.

A third limitation in the present study is that it excludes other forms of extracurricular activities that do not fall under the definition of extracurricular activities for this study. The present study was limited to defining extracurricular activities by four categories. Some students participated in extracurricular activities that did not fall under any of the four categories available, and so were not recorded as such.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings and limitations of the present research open the doors to topics for future research. Interest in the migrant student population could lead researchers to an interest in conducting further research that focuses on the relationship between extracurricular activities and this population’s academic achievement at all levels of education. Further research that addresses this relationship among migrant students is necessary at the high school, middle school and elementary school levels. It is important to examine at what level of a student’s education extracurricular activities begin playing an important role. There is a need to expand existing research addressing K-12 students, focusing particularly on the needs of migrant students.

Although there is a need for future research in other levels of education, there is still ample room for research at the university level. Future research that considers other forms of engagement (internships, jobs, civic engagement) that may have a positive relationship with the academic achievement of CAMP students is also of interest. Furthermore, the interview findings for the present study shows that fifty percent of the students interviewed are part of a Greek organization, either fraternity or sorority, at CSUS. Many of the participants focused on their participation in their fraternity or sorority to express how extracurricular involvement has impacted their success. The present findings open future research possibilities that focus on the effect participation in Greek organizations has on students in CAMP.

CONCLUSION

The present study shows a high level of CAMP student participation in extracurricular activities at CSUS and the ways in which they benefit from participation during their educational attainment. Based on the testimonies of the students interviewed, the researcher can conclude that participating in extracurricular activities builds resilience to stay focused in academics and...
build a sense of connection with their campus. These findings are important to help increase retention and graduation rates of CAMP students and Latino students in general. Helping examine ways in which CAMP can help the students is also beneficial because the program can become a model program for other retention programs. There are other programs at the university that serve minority students with similar characteristics as CAMP students, which can benefit from the present study.

Based on these findings, the researcher recommends that CAMP increases its focus on engaging students in extracurricular activities as a form of fostering school connectivity in the first year. Creating a connection to school through extracurricular activities can be beneficial in the long run because retention rates may increase along with the grade point averages of its students. For CAMP students, a sense of belonging at the university that can come from participation in extracurricular activities can determine whether some students stay in school or drop out, making this an important factor in the academic success rates of Latinos, and, likely, other students.
REFERENCES


