

Engaging students' career development

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide makes suggestions about how staff working in student career development can enhance student engagement.



Encourage students' involvement in extracurricular activities

Employers recruit graduates who are well rounded and have a range of skills over and above those gained in the classroom. Encouraging students to engage in a variety of extracurricular activities, both at university and externally, will develop their skills in a range of key areas.

Extracurricular activities help students to develop the 'additional to academic skills' employers seek. These skills are often related to universities' graduate attributes and include communication, teamwork, problem solving and organisation among many other skills.

Participating in extracurricular activities helps to enhance students' resumes and interview content. Students can present evidence of participation in these activities to demonstrate they are well rounded and have a range of sought after skills.

Also, students' knowledge of themselves – their interests, aptitudes, values and strengths – grows enormously with exposure to a range of different activities and experiences. This in turn makes for more informed career decision making.

The best ways for students to get involved

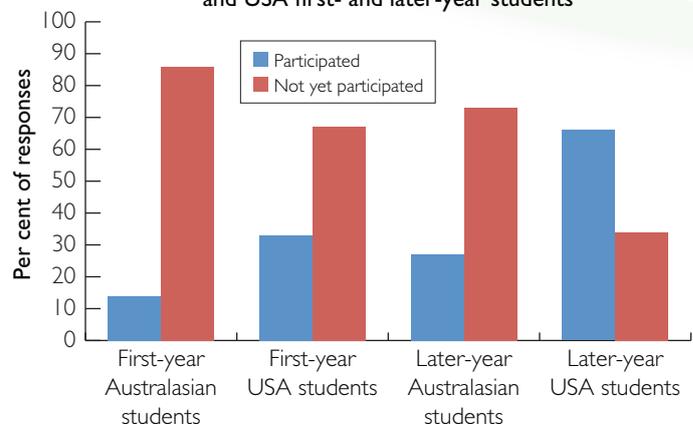
On campus, students can get involved in a number of ways. They can host new students during orientation, become a peer mentor, assist on open day, write for the student newspaper, serve as an office bearer for the student union, be actively involved in a club or society. Off campus, students can do volunteer work – this is especially useful if the work is related to the student's career goals. Many universities offer their students access to volunteer positions through Go Volunteer, SEEK Volunteer, Volunteering Australia and other local volunteer organisations.

Other activities that could be valuable in broadening students' lives and their development beyond university include sporting clubs, community groups, involvement in a range of interest areas, plus of course part-time or casual paid work. Students could also participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award or Young Achievement Australia. All of these activities develop skills and knowledge and enable students to learn more about themselves and their interests, aptitudes, values and strengths.

A key role of the careers professional is to assist students to understand the value of participating in these activities, and to provide students with insight about the learning that can occur through involvement in them. Assisting them to see the relevance to later employment, and where careers may link in with these activities, is one of the key roles of the career professional.

This graph uses data from the 2008 AUSSE and 2008 NSSE to illustrate the low rate of participation in volunteer work by students from Australia and New Zealand when compared with US students' participation rates.

Rates of participation in volunteer work by Australasian and USA first- and later-year students



How to stimulate involvement

Get the message out to students, in whatever ways are possible on your campus, about the abundant opportunities open to them. You could try the following, which work well.

Put the message about broader involvement on your home page, highlighting alumni or graduate profiles in a highly visible spot (your alumni unit may be able to assist here). Contact past graduates and ask them to speak to students on campus. You can enlist the help of academic staff here too.

You could hold a volunteer day in addition to your careers fair, where you can advertise opportunities such as hosting or mentoring students and volunteering for various organisations. Emphasise the benefits to students. Repeat the benefits of getting involved in volunteering and other activities to your academic colleagues. Include a handout in orientation material about the value of getting involved.

Make sure your casual and part-time work page advertising opportunities for students also highlights why (in addition to financial gain) working casually or part-time is great for your career.

Work integrated learning

Work integrated learning is one of the key aspects of student engagement that is relevant to staff involved in student career development.

Work integrated learning provides many benefits to students, including:

- an opportunity to put theory into practice and gain valuable workplace knowledge and skills;
- an insight into an industry or career they may be interested in pursuing;
- a range of valuable experiences and insights that can be highlighted in the resume and during interviews; and
- better insight into, and appreciation of, theoretical content on return to the classroom.

Careers staff can best assist students to extract the most from work integrated learning by:

- assisting students to best understand what they have learned and experienced, and why that is valuable to employers;
- assisting students to optimally present both the skills and knowledge they have gained via their resume; and
- encouraging students to document their experiences in an e-portfolio when that option is available.

For other stakeholders, careers staff can also add to the value of work integrated learning by:

- working with academics to ensure they are assisting students to understand the value of work integrated learning;
- determining if a graduate employer may be prepared to take students on for a period of work experience;
- encouraging students who have undertaken work experience or another form of work integrated learning to speak to other students in class to convey the benefits and give other students advice; and
- linking with employers to see if they could take more students and students from other areas.



Clearly, there are myriad ways in which careers staff can encourage and help students participate in activities that enhance learning and development outcomes. This is important in and of itself. Encouraging students to participate in these types of activities helps students augment capabilities that will help them build their future careers.

What impact can careers guidance staff have on student engagement?

To enhance student engagement, careers guidance staff can:

- act as a key source of expert, current knowledge in the university about what employers are seeking in the way of skills and knowledge in addition to technical knowledge and classroom learning;
- collect resources relevant to this – there's no need to do it all yourself – collect resources from your campus or in your community and interpret it for the students;
- make these resources available and visible to students;
- promote the value of involvement to students (and academic staff) at every opportunity;
- publish good news stories of student endeavours wherever possible, using websites, university newspaper and flyers; and
- ensure your workshops and individual consultations with students highlight the importance of, and possibilities for, student involvement with relevant groups on and off campus.

About this guide

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide forms part of the suite of resources developed by ACER and the broader AUSSE community to enhance students' engagement in effective educational practices. This guide was written by Di Rachinger, General Manager of Student Engagement at the University of Melbourne. Visit www.acer.edu.au/ausse for further information about the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement.