

Participation in a University Equestrian Club and Team: Perceived Learning Outcomes

Erin Mikulec & Kathleen McKinney

Illinois State University

Introduction

- Theoretical ideas and empirical research about the importance of involvement in college/university life for learning, development, and persistence have been in the literature for many years (Astin 1984, 1996; Kuh, 1995).
- One type of involvement experience is participation in student organizations and clubs.
- Much of this work, however, has been on students as members in three types of organizations: student government, the Greek system and formal athletics (Kuh & Lund, 1994; Miles, 2011, Long, 2012; Pike 2000; Rische, 2003).
- One specific type of student organization is a recreational program or sport club. Some literature exists on the nature or outcomes of participation at the collegiate level in campus recreation programs and organizations or in specific sport clubs (Bryant, Banta & Bradley, 1995; Haines, 2001).
- Hall-Yamnessa and Forrester (2004) and Hall, Forrester and Borsz (2008) found that participation in such clubs resulted in the development of leadership and communication skills, an improved ability to understand the consequences of one's actions, and an increased ability to identify one's personal values and balance academic, personal and professional roles.



Objectives

- The purpose of our study is to report students' motivations to join one type of collegiate sport club, an equestrian club and team, as well as their perceived learning outcomes from participating in the club.
- We report quantitative and qualitative data from volunteer student club members, team members, and executive board members from the Illinois State University Equestrian Club and Teams.
- This study helps to fill gaps in the extant literature on involvement and learning in terms of:
 - expanding the types of student organizations studied
 - providing more qualitative data
 - examining learning outcomes from an out-of class experience for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning literature, rather than those from classes and academic programs

Table 1 - Participants

	ISU n=14
Average number of semesters of participation	3.4
Year in school	
Alumnus	0 (0.0)
Senior	3 (.21)
Junior	8 (.58)
Sophomore	2 (.14)
Freshman	1 (.07)
Role	
*Respondents could choose more than one	
Club Member	14 (1.0)
Team Member	13 (.93)
Executive Board	7 (.50)

Methods and Materials

- An anonymous online survey was sent to participants, who were current and recent members of the ISU Equestrians.
- The survey asked the following:
 - Year in school
 - Major
 - Club/Team/Executive board membership
 - Number of semesters of participation
 - Open-ended questions asking for reasons for participating in the club/team and how roles and experiences have contributed to learning
 - Ten Likert-scale items asking to what extent participation in the club/team has impacted specific skills
- Given the exploratory nature of our study, the small N size, and the purposive and convenience sample, the goal was to obtain descriptive data, mostly qualitative but some quantitative, about students' perceptions of outcomes from their participation in the club/team.
- Likert-scale items were reported in terms of mean response.
- Both researchers independently coded open-ended responses for emerging themes. The researchers compared findings and frequency to determine main themes throughout the open-ended responses. Themes are illustrated with example quotes.

Table 2
Why did you choose to participate in the Equestrians? What do you hope to get from being part of this group?

ISU n=14
Meet people with a shared interest <i>At home I had a group of friends from my barn and wanted to find a group like that again down at school.</i>
Continue to ride and develop riding skills at college <i>I grew as an equestrian and gained valuable knowledge I wouldn't have in a normal lesson setting.</i>
Passion for/Love of horses <i>I've been riding since I was seven years old. The Equestrian Team was part of the reason I chose to attend ISU.</i>
Be part of a team and compete at shows <i>The team has grown a bond that we have never experienced in the past.</i>

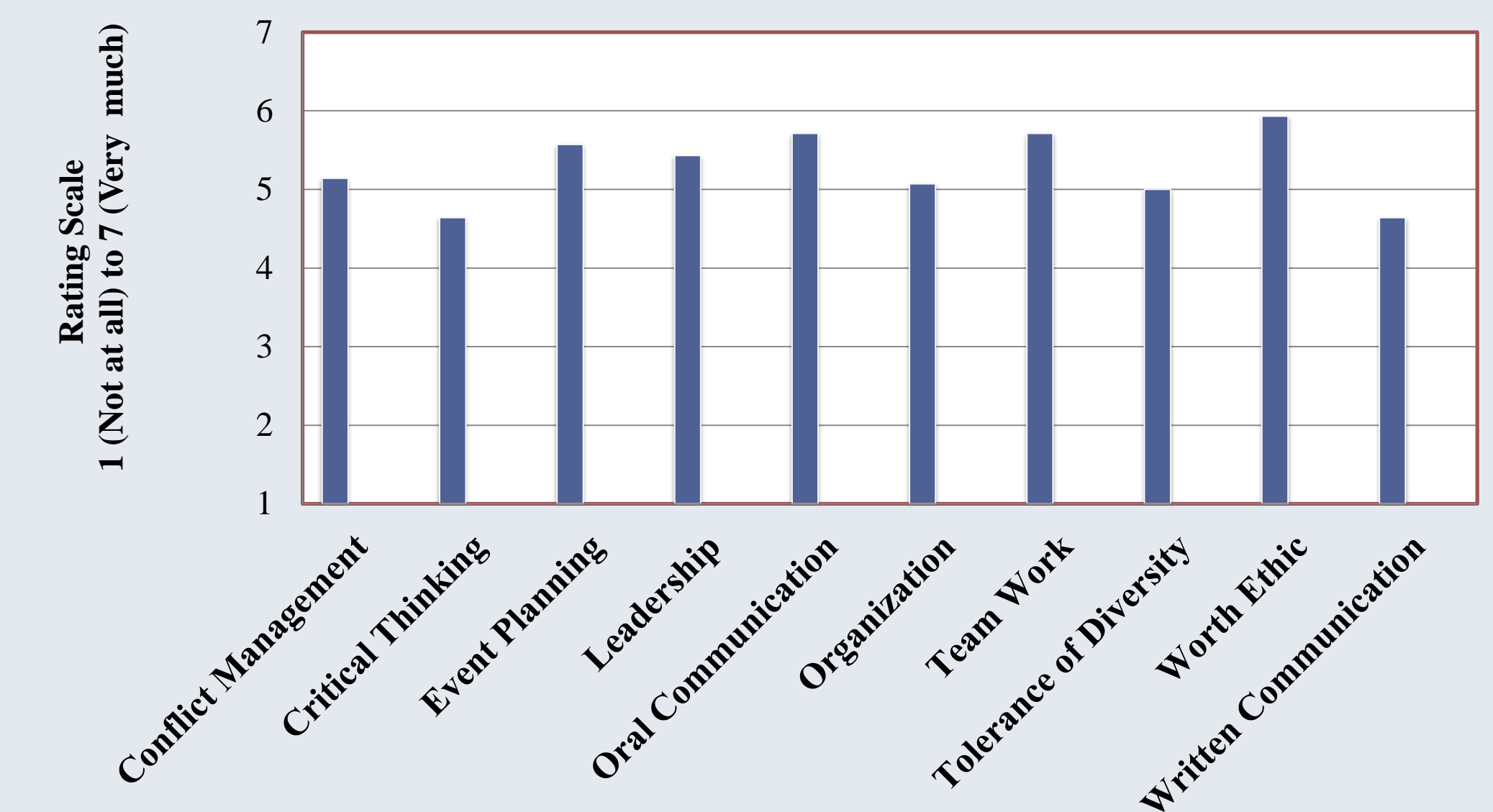
Table 3
How do you believe the different roles available (club/team/exec board) to you as a member of the Equestrians have or will impact you as an equestrian, student and soon-to-be-professional?

ISU n=14
Grow and develop as a rider <i>It has given me a ton of experience riding horses I'm not familiar with...this helps you as a rider and to become more solid in your abilities.</i>
Time management <i>I learned to manage my time better between the barn, work and school.</i>
Leadership/Problem-solving skills <i>I have learned that sometimes unpopular decisions need to be made in order to appeal to the greater good and club as a whole.</i>
Learning to work and communicate with different people <i>As a student it has forced me to work with adults and other students.</i>

Summary of Results

- Likert-scale items revealed 5 skills scoring above the midpoint on perceived learning, including Conflict Management, Leadership, Oral Communication, Team Work and Work Ethic (See Figure 1).
- Several themes emerged from the open-ended responses for motivations to join, including meeting people with shared interest and improving equestrian skills (See Table 2).
- Open-ended responses yielded consistent themes about areas of learning, including development as a rider, time management, and leadership and collaboration (See Table 3).

Figure 1. To what extent has participation with the Equestrian Team/Club increased your development of the following skills?



Conclusions

- While an equestrian club/team is a "meeting space" for students with a shared interest, that is merely a starting point for the development of a range of skills.
- The multiple roles available to students in an equestrian club/team allow for more meaningful experiences as members must work successfully with professionals in off-campus settings, such as barn managers, as well as on-campus professionals.
- Students had both interpersonal and equestrian-related reasons for joining the club and team.
- Participation in a collegiate equestrian club/team provides an opportunity for members to compete individually with the support of a team, leading to an increased knowledge of teamwork.
- Respondents reported their participation increased their development in three areas. The first of these areas was work ethic, including aspects of time management and balancing various roles. The second area was communication and working with others. Finally, the third area of development was leadership.

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Erin Mikulec
School of Teaching & Learning • Illinois State University

Erin Mikulec is Assistant Professor of Secondary Education in the School of Teaching and Learning at Illinois State University. Along with courses in secondary ed, she works closely with two school partners for clinical experiences, YouthBuild of McLean County and The Alliance School of Milwaukee, WI. During the Spring 2014 semester, Dr. Mikulec has been on a Fulbright Scholarship at the University of Helsinki to study secondary teacher education in Finland.



Kathleen McKinney
Cross Endowed Chair in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning • Illinois State University

Kathleen McKinney is the Cross Endowed Chair in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), and Professor of Sociology, Emeritus at Illinois State University. Her areas of research are social psychology and teaching and learning in sociology. In 2003-2004 she was a Carnegie Scholar. She is active in the SoTL movement internationally both within and beyond her discipline.

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