

Finding Collegiality in College: How to Increase Student Participation

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During my first semester here at New York City College of Technology (City Tech), I simply chose to make it a boring “routine.” After finishing my classes, I would head straight home or do something else, which made life rather tedious. After that semester, I decided to make a change. I would be more involved and seek out the opportunities available to me. As my second semester rolled on, there was certainly a change in how time passed. Not only did I begin to feel more inclined to stick around after class, but also I came across organizations and groups that sparked my interest, such as the Student Government Association (SGA) and the Technology and Design Club. Furthermore, I was made aware of various beneficial opportunities such as prestigious scholarships, the Honors Scholars Program, and the National Society of Collegiate Scholars (NSCS). By then, I realized that one of the most essential aspects of the college experience is involvement in the college; however, I felt that there was a lack of student interest when it came to college activities outside classes. But then, I thought, since City Tech is indeed a commuter school, perhaps the students here are simply busy with other commitments such as families or jobs. Notwithstanding the realities faced by other students, I am positive that there are students just like me who are simply unaware of the opportunities available to them. I believe that increasing student awareness of opportunities and events, as well as encouraging students to participate in activities outside classes such as student clubs or committees can improve the college community at City Tech.

Specifically, one improvement I feel should be made is further emphasis on the importance of student clubs. Club participation is a great way to promote communication among peers who share common interests and goals. From my experience, by being a part of a club, I learned more about various opportunities and received helpful advice such as what classes to take; however, when compared to other CUNY colleges, I noticed that the lack of club participation is staggering. I surveyed 20 randomly selected students, and asked them various questions. One question I asked was, “What are City Tech’s club hours?” Fifteen students either got the time incorrect or simply did not know. That can be calculated as seventy-five percent of students surveyed who were unaware of City Tech’s current club hours! Sure, 20 students out of the campus’ over fifteen thousand seems like an inadequate sample, but it does not make the results any less concerning. I believe that

promoting student club participation will greatly benefit not only the student body, but also the school as a whole. Many students, especially freshmen, walk in with limited knowledge of what is going on around them as well as of the opportunities available to them. Clubs are great ways to connect new students to senior students who share common interests, and for the senior students to share their experiences with them in return. Furthermore, I realized from my own experiences that clubs strengthen the bonds between students and faculty, as the club's faculty advisor usually ends up becoming a mentor to club members, as well as serving as a door for all the members to meet the rest of the faculty in their respective majors. Being in the Technology and Design club, for example, has given me the opportunity to get to know the professors in my department, Computer Systems Technology, and has helped me tremendously. Another example would be the "Mock Trial Club" and "Paralegal Club" which has influenced the unity of the Paralegal Department among both students and faculty. My decision to join a club has been truly influential and has provided me with priceless insight. My desire is for students to know just how much it could benefit them, as it did me, and so many others.

Another area that suffers from a lack of student participation is the College Council. City Tech's College Council is responsible for various decisions that directly affect our students' lives. A recent problem is that, due to a lack of student participation, the council has been unable to make quorum, thus preventing the Council from passing any decisions. As a result of this, the faculty is thinking of removing the student representation from the Council. There is no reason this should be happening, for student interest in such important decisions should be a given. All of the students whom I spoke to about potentially losing a privilege were immediately interested. So how is it that there is a lack of participation? I believe that the problem is a lack of awareness. I simply did not know that the College Council even existed! This shouldn't be the reason for students to lose any more privileges. I believe that at a time when cuts are common and our rights are being compromised left and right, making the best use of our privileges is important.

Strong club involvement will make it easier to garner participants for college-wide events. The first step that I would take to implement these improvements would be to bring more innovation to the current advertisement effort. As an active student within the college campus, I am a witness to the hard work put forward by Student Life and college faculty to get students involved and aware of upcoming events; however, I feel that much progress can be made from exploring various untapped potential. For starters, we can take advantage of the creativity and the desire of design students to show off their talents; creating an advertisement poster that students can connect to would be a great way to generate talk among the students. In addition, placing screens in high-traffic areas such as the sixth floor atrium lounge, where many students pass by or simply relax, will earn events and announcements much-needed exposure. I have no doubt that the students would not mind

sitting to watch a video or two while they relax.

Also, being a part of the SGA, I know just how underutilized the college club budgets can be. As the year drew to a close, one of our goals was to simply encourage clubs to use their money. Why not put it to a creative use? For example, why not use the club budget to hold competitions between the various clubs? The “Club Fair” events, in which clubs to compete with one another for the title of “Best Table,” is a great start. Why not take it a step further and hold more in-depth competitions that would strike up interest among the student club members?

Another great step in the right direction would be to encourage professors to promote student activity on the college campus. The “Speech Competition” held twice a year usually has a great turnout rate, simply because the speech professors encourage their students to participate. Sometimes, a simple gesture is all it takes. In fact, this essay would have never happened if it weren’t for Professor Lansiquot, with whom I am working in Advanced Technical Writing, letting me know that the deadline for submitting this essay was extended. My initial reaction was, “Deadline? What deadline? Classes are over already?” Learning more from my professor, I was eager to address the important issues raised by the City Tech Student Government Leadership Award.

The constant that can make all this happen is technology. Technology is more than just a fad; it is an important component in the way we live our lives. City Tech does a good job in utilizing the Internet to make students’ lives easier, from the Electronic Student Planner (ESP) that helps students keep track of their major, to the Blackboard content management system to support students in their courses. In fact, this makes sense, since, after all, we are New York City College of Technology. Since we are, I strongly feel that there is no reason why our school website is so neglected and underutilized. I was excited to do research about which club I wanted to join, only to discover that the list on the website was sorely outdated. I was enthusiastic to be involved with SGA, only to end up addressing the wrong person in my email, due to an outdated roster. I strove to apply for the Honors Scholars Program, only to find out that the actual deadline was different from what was posted on the website. Updating the website is not only quick and easy, but also absolutely beneficial. Of course, this lack of information can definitely be compensated by simple diligence, but I still feel that such a problem may turn away a vast number of students who would otherwise be interested, while having an updated website can only help to invite students to participate. Whenever any student seeks to use any of the utilities provided for him or her, or any information regarding the school, the starting point is always the same—the school’s home page. This fact makes that one page the single highest-traffic area when it comes to exposure. In fact, I have the electronic poster that says, “Computer Technology Design Team wins first place for innovation” embedded in my brain after seeing it so many times on the homepage. Why not take advantage of this? A simple box in the corner with

recent events is all it really takes to grab the attention of students. Technology as we know it can only progress further, and we can benefit the most by progressing with it.

Every day, I am becoming more aware of how important seizing opportunities is. I started with a severe lack of interest and drive, with the whole “let’s get this over with as quickly as possible” attitude hovering over me; however, once I started being more involved, one accomplishment led to another. From being nominated to being a part of the SGA, to being accepted into the Honors Scholars Program, to being voted in as president of the club I initially sought to join, it has truly been a rewarding experience. None of this would have been possible had I not taken that first step. So, to engage its students, City Tech should embrace its own identity to help other students take their first step in being involved by celebrating why some of us want to take in every experience here that we can.

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