

How important are extracurricular activities for student employability?

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Students in higher education are often encouraged to do volunteer work and engage in extracurricular activities. It is argued that these real-world practical experiences allow students to apply theoretical knowledge and develop personal and professional skills, making them both better students and more attractive for future employers. But to what extent do extracurricular activities actually contribute to make geoscience students more attractive to Norwegian employers when applying for part-time jobs?

This question was explored through interviews with people in different companies who were advertising for geoscience students for part-time positions. The interviews explored what the employers were looking for when hiring students, and to what degree they emphasise grades, course subjects and extracurricular activities.

Throughout my interviews I found that employers first and foremost look at grades and subject compositions. However, extracurricular activities were also highly emphasised. The interviewees described extracurricular activities being used to distinguish students among peers with similar backgrounds and grades. Furthermore, the extracurricular activities is taken as a signal of good communication and collaborative abilities by the employers; the employers expect these students to do well in social settings and the work environment.

Extracurricular activities and student involvement are, in other words, an important quality that employers in this study seek out. Interestingly, it seems to matter less what type of extracurricular activity students engage in. The interviewees were not only interested in students with geo-related experiences. They viewed all extracurricular activities as positive, since they were all regarded as indicators of good social and communicative skills.

Also, it appears that a student cannot be *too* active (as long as grades do not suffer). Subject skills will always be put first for the employers I have been in contact with. If extracurricular activities come at the expense of good grades, the employer may not consider the student for a position. On the other hand, if a student maintains good grades, there is no such thing as too many extracurricular activities.

This leads me to conclude that it is important to promote extracurricular activities. If it is related to geosciences or simply an interesting hobby, it will be valued by prospective employers.