

# Extracurricular activities in young applicants' résumés: What are the motives behind their involvement?

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Applicants use résumés to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, abilities, and other personal characteristics (KSAOs) to recruiters, through education and job-related or non-job-related experiences. But research suggests that the situation for young applicants is especially competitive, since they increasingly enter the labour market with similar educational credentials and limited job-related experience. They may thus use non-job-related experiences, such as participation in extracurricular activities (ECAs) during their studies, to demonstrate KSAOs to recruiters, but also to add distinction and value to their credentials. ECAs may therefore become more important in the selection of young applicants. Yet few studies have undertaken a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the relationships students have with these activities. The purpose of this study was to investigate to what extent students' involvement in ECAs is due to internal (e.g., passion) or external (e.g., résumé-building) motives, and what factors influence these motives. Results from a study with 197 students suggest that students engage in ECAs mainly out of internal motives. But external motives are stronger for activities started closer to entering the labour market, for students active in associative or volunteering activities (as compared to sports or artistic activities), and for students holding leadership positions in their activities. Our results suggest that labour market pressure may be a key component of applicants' involvement in ECAs. Also, organizations and recruiters may want to consider that students tend not to engage in ECAs purely out of internal motives, but also to add value to their credentials and match employers' expectations.

**Keywords:** Extracurricular activities; Résumé screening; Motivation; Labour market.

Les candidats produisent des curriculum vitae pour démontrer aux recruteurs leurs connaissances, compétences, habiletés et d'autres caractéristiques personnelles (CCHA) liées à leur éducation et leurs expériences de travail ou extérieures au travail. Cependant, la recherche suggère que les jeunes candidats se retrouvent dans une situation particulièrement compétitive puisqu'ils arrivent sur le marché de l'emploi avec les mêmes acquis scolaires et une expérience de travail limitée. Ils peuvent donc utiliser leurs expériences autres que le travail, comme la participation à des activités périscolaires (APS) durant leurs études, pour démontrer leurs CCHA aux recruteurs en ajoutant aussi une singularité et une valeur à leurs acquis scolaires. Ainsi, les APS peuvent devenir plus importantes dans la sélection des jeunes candidats. Cependant, peu d'études ont entrepris une analyse compréhensive et systématique de la relation que les étudiants entretiennent avec ces activités. L'objectif de la présente étude est d'investiguer jusqu'à quel point l'engagement des étudiants dans les APS est dû à des motivations internes (ex. la passion) ou externes (ex. la construction d'un curriculum vitae) et de déterminer quels sont les facteurs influençant ces motivations. Les résultats d'une étude auprès de 197 étudiants suggèrent que les étudiants s'engagent dans des APS principalement pour des motivations internes. Mais, les motivations externes sont plus fortes pour les activités ayant lieu juste avant l'entrée sur le marché du travail pour les étudiants participant à des activités associatives et de bénévolat (comparativement aux activités sportives ou artistiques) et pour les étudiants qui ont une position de leader dans leurs activités. Nos résultats suggèrent que la pression du marché de l'emploi pourrait être une composante-clé de l'engagement dans des APS. Aussi, les

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organisations et les recruteurs peuvent considérer que les étudiants tendent non seulement à s'engager dans des APS pour des motivations internes, mais aussi pour augmenter la valeur de leurs acquis scolaires et rencontrer les attentes des employeurs.

**L**os solicitantes usan resúmenes curriculares para demostrar sus conocimientos, competencias, habilidades y otras características personales a los reclutadores (KSAOs), por medio de educación y experiencias laborales o no laborales. Sin embargo, la investigación sugiere que la situación para los solicitantes jóvenes es especialmente competitiva, ya que cada vez más entran al mercado laboral con credenciales educacionales similares y una limitada experiencia laboral. Pueden entonces usar experiencias no laborales, como su participación en actividades extracurriculares (ECAs) durante sus estudios, para demostrar KSAOs a los reclutadores, pero también para añadir distinción y valor a sus credenciales. Las ECAs pueden por consiguiente volverse más importantes en la selección de solicitantes jóvenes. Aún pocos estudios han realizado un análisis exhaustivo y sistemático de las relaciones que tienen los estudiantes con estas actividades. El propósito de este estudio fue investigar en qué medida la participación de los estudiantes en ECAs se debe a motivos internos (p. ej., pasión) o externos (p. ej., construcción de curriculum), y qué factores influyen estos motivos. Los resultados de un estudio con 197 estudiantes sugieren que los estudiantes se involucran en ECAs principalmente por motivos internos. Sin embargo, los motivos externos son más fuertes para las actividades que iniciaron próximas a la entrada al mercado laboral, para estudiantes activos en actividades asociativas o de voluntariado (comparadas con las actividades deportivas o artísticas), y para estudiantes con posiciones de liderazgo en sus actividades. Nuestros resultados sugieren que la presión del mercado laboral puede ser un componente clave de la participación de los solicitantes en ECAs. Además, las organizaciones y reclutadores pueden querer considerar que los estudiantes no sólo tiendan a involucrarse en ECAs exclusivamente por motivos internos, sino también para añadir valor a sus credenciales y satisfacer las expectativas de los empleadores.

Résumé screening is the commonest selection method for jobs (Cole, Feild, Giles, & Harris, 2009). It allows recruiters to form first impressions of applicants' qualities and determine whether they possess the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other personal characteristics (KSAOs; Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004) required for the position. Two aspects that play a major role in personnel selection are person–job (P–J) fit and person–organization (P–O) fit. Generally, recruiters assess P–J fit using the “KSA” part (e.g., competencies, skills, experiences) while they assess P–O fit using the “O” part (e.g., personality, values, motivation) (Kristof-Brown, 2000). Applicants have to acquire the KSAOs valued by potential employers and demonstrate how they meet organizations' needs in the three main sections of their résumés: education credentials, job-related experiences, and non-job-related experiences (Cole et al., 2009; Nemanick & Clark, 2002).

Here, we focus on non-job-related experiences, and more particularly on extracurricular activities (ECAs) as representing an innovative way for applicants, especially young graduates, to demonstrate KSAOs to organizations. Few studies have undertaken a comprehensive and systematic investigation of the relationship students have with ECAs. This paper is organized as follows: We first describe the three sources of information related to KSAOs in résumés. We then focus on non-job-related experiences, specifically on ECAs.

Finally, we describe our study investigating students' motives to participate in ECAs.

### THREE SOURCES OF INFORMATION IN APPLICANTS' RÉSUMÉS

#### Education credentials and job-related experiences

Education is valued by recruiters in résumés, especially for less experienced applicants (Cole, Rubin, Feild, & Giles, 2007; Hutchinson, 1984). Applicants' educational credentials include information such as degrees earned, college major, grades, relevant courses, or school/university prestige (Cole et al., 2009; Howard, 1986). Recruiters may use such information to infer KSAs, because they expect education to provide graduates with skills or abilities (Hesketh, 2000). For instance, good grades may signal math and communication abilities (Brown & Campion, 1994). Furthermore, mentioning more relevant coursework and higher grades in one's résumé increase the chances to be invited for an interview (Thoms, McMasters, Roberts, & Dombkowsky, 1999). Yet the development of mass higher education in many countries (Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2003; Tomlinson, 2008) has led to an increasing number of graduates entering the labour market each year (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). The value of educational credentials is therefore decreasing, because it is more difficult

for employers to use this information to choose among applicants. Educational credentials are thus not sufficient for applicants to distinguish themselves from others (Tomlinson, 2008).

Recruiters also look for job experience in applicants' résumés (Cole et al., 2007; Hutchinson, 1984), inferring KSAOs from previous job positions held, responsibilities encountered, and past employers' reputation. For instance, relevant experience signals competence (Knouse, 1994). Such inferences are less straightforward with young graduates, who have limited job experience. But recruiters can look for competencies using experience from part-time jobs or internships (Brown & Campion, 1994).

### Non-job-related experiences

Non-job-related experiences include hobbies and interests, community service or, for young graduates, ECAs. Participating in ECAs is part of the life of many students during their education (Marsh, 1992; Rubin, Bommer, & Baldwin, 2002). ECA participation has a positive effect on academic and postacademic outcomes (Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003; Marsh, 1992).

ECAs are good indicators of individuals' KSAs. Managers who participate in more ECAs develop skills such as decision-making, creativity, interpersonal skills, or resistance to stress (Howard, 1986). People who participate in more ECAs report higher communication, initiative, and decision-making skills (Rubin et al., 2002). Young graduates may use ECA participation to compensate for limited work experience and thus demonstrate KSAs that would not be otherwise visible on their résumé (Brown & Campion, 1994; Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Nemanick & Clark, 2002). For instance, recruiters can infer leadership competencies from an applicant who was a club's vice-president (Nemanick & Clark, 2002) or interpersonal skills from volunteering (Hustinx et al., 2010). Recruiters also infer the "O" part (e.g., applicant's character or personality) from ECAs (Cole et al., 2009). For instance, a fraternity member can be perceived as being extraverted (Cole et al., 2009) and volunteers can be perceived as being good citizens (Handy et al., 2010).

Organizations value ECAs when screening applicants (Feldman Barr & McNeilly, 2002). Résumés containing more ECAs and more leadership positions in these activities receive better evaluations and more invitations for interviews (Cole et al., 2007; Nemanick & Clark, 2002), as well as more job offers (Chia, 2005).

Participation in ECAs increases graduates' chances to find jobs corresponding to their qualifications (Merino, 2007). Therefore students participate in ECAs and probably intend to use such experiences later, when applying for jobs. At the same time, recruiters use ECAs as indicators of KSAOs in applicants' résumés. Yet very few studies have undertaken a comprehensive and systematic investigation of students' motives to engage in ECAs.

### Motives to engage in ECAs

Self-determination theory (SDT) suggests that people perform an action either because it is interesting or enjoyable (i.e., intrinsic/internal motivation) or because it may lead to positive outcomes (i.e., extrinsic/external motivation) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students may thus engage in ECAs because they are interested or passionate about them (i.e., out of internal motives), but also because they perceive these activities as valuable for their future career and they can instrumentalize them to meet people or build their résumés (i.e., out of more external motives). External motives are also related to subjective norms; that is, the way others (e.g., potential employers, but also classmates or family members) will perceive students' involvement in ECAs (Ajzen, 1991). Previous studies of the motives of students participating in specific ECAs (e.g., sports or artistic activities) have mainly highlighted internal motives (Barnett, 2006). Also, students' involvement in volunteering was mainly motivated by internal factors, such as value-driven reasons (Handy et al., 2010; Hustinx et al., 2010). More generally, ECAs are activities students perform voluntarily as a complement to (compulsory) education activities. Therefore, SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) would suggest that students should mainly engage in various ECAs out of internal motives.

*Hypothesis 1* Overall, students will report stronger internal than external motives to engage in ECAs.

Yet some factors may lead students to have stronger external motives to engage in ECAs. SDT suggests that external pressures could increase external motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For instance, students report more external motives to engage in ECAs when they have the possibility of getting credit (Merino, 2007). Students also engage in volunteering more for résumé-building reasons in job markets where employers use such activities

to infer productivity, such as Canada and the US (Hustinx et al., 2010). Anecdotes suggest that some students deliberately undertake ECAs to demonstrate competencies employers are looking for (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). In a recent study, some students openly reported external motives to engage in ECAs (e.g., networking or résumé-building; Roulin & Bangerter, 2011). But there was little indication about what factors may influence such behaviors.

One explanation may be the time when students first got involved in the activity. On the one hand, activities started earlier, such as a sport started as a child, are likely to be mainly motivated by internal reasons (e.g., interest). On the other hand, as students come closer to the labour market, they may start to perceive competitive pressure (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). This pressure may be especially strong in the many countries where the graduation rate is rising and where young graduates expect to face an increasingly competitive labour market. Students may recognize that they need to do something to increase their chances to get a job (Tomlinson, 2008), and realize how ECAs could help them demonstrate KSAOs. Therefore, subsequent involvement in activities is likely to be motivated more by external motives (e.g., résumé-building or networking).

*Hypothesis 2a* Students will report stronger external motives to engage in ECAs for subsequent activities than for initial activities.

Another explanation for differences in motivation could be leadership positions applicants hold in ECAs. Leadership positions on résumés are especially valued by employers (Nemanick & Clark, 2002; Rubin et al., 2002), probably because they interpret such information as an indicator of leadership or interpersonal abilities. Some students may be aware of such attributions and choose to adopt leadership roles in their activities because of potential positive external rewards (i.e., making a good impression on recruiters).

*Hypothesis 2b* Students holding leadership positions will report engaging in ECAs more out of external motives than those who do not hold leadership positions.

Students' motives may also differ from one type of activity to another. Sports and artistic activities are generally depicted as being mainly internally motivated (Barnett, 2006). For instance, involvement in sports has been explained by competition-seeking or health motives (e.g., Recours, Souville, & Griffet, 2004). On the other hand, involvement in volunteering may be at least partially influenced

by external (i.e., career-oriented) motives (Clary et al., 1998; Handy et al., 2010). Students' associations and volunteering activities often operate in organizational structures and often include roles and responsibilities for their members, and a hierarchy with leadership positions. Such activities resemble actual business activities more than sports or artistic activities. Some students may thus engage in such activities because they expect them to be rewarded on the job market.

*Hypothesis 2c* External motives to engage in ECAs will be stronger for students involved in associative–volunteering activities than for those involved in sports or artistic activities.

Moreover, involvement in ECAs has been related to having more KSAOs (e.g., leadership abilities, interpersonal skills; Howard, 1986; Rubin et al., 2002). But involvement in different activities may also lead to developing different skills (Rubin et al., 2002). For instance, volunteering for the Red Cross and singing gospel may not develop similar skills. Students may recognize that associative and volunteering activities resemble business activities more and perceive them to allow development of more KSAOs than sports or artistic ones.

*Hypothesis 3* Students perceive associative or volunteering activities to allow acquisition of more business-related KSAOs than sports or artistic activities.

In the next sections, we present data from a questionnaire study testing these hypotheses with business and law students from a Swiss university.

## METHOD

### Sample and procedure

Our sample comprised 197 students from a university in French-speaking Switzerland. Participants voluntarily completed a questionnaire after class. Mean age was 21.82 years ( $SD = 1.65$ ), 101 were women; 116 were Bachelor students, 77 were Master students, and four did not provide their current level of education; 105 were law students and 92 business students. Twenty-four percent of participants expected graduation within one year, 38% within two years, and 38% in more than two years. Fifty-two percent were working at part-time jobs during their studies (6.5 hours per week on average,  $SD = 4.19$ ).

## Measures

### Participation in ECAs

Students indicated whether or not they were involved in any ECA. If they were, they provided detailed information about up to three ECAs. They indicated the type of ECA among four possibilities: *individual sports* (e.g., swimming), *team sports* (e.g., basketball), *students' associations or volunteering* (e.g., association of economics students), and *artistic activities* (e.g., dancing). They also indicated number of years in the activity, hours spent per week, and whether or not they held leadership positions.

### Activity order

If students were involved in more than one activity, information for the ECA they started first was coded as "initial ECA" and information for activity/activities started later as "subsequent ECAs" (see Table 1).

### Motives for ECA participation

For each activity they mentioned, participants indicated their motives for participating from a list of six motives developed from previous research (Clary et al., 1998; Hustinx et al., 2010; Roulin & Bangerter, 2011): *by interest or passion, to do something other than studies, to meet people, to help others, to acquire practical experience, and because it will look good on my résumé*. All motives were evaluated on five-point rating scales, from "completely disagree" to "completely agree." An exploratory factor analysis with principal component analysis and varimax rotation on the six

motives revealed two factors. The first factor included the last four motives, explained 37.3% of the variance, and was labeled "*external motives*" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76$ ). The second factor included the first two motives and explained an additional 24.2% of the variance, but because of low reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .45$ ), we kept only *by interest or passion* and we called this one-item factor "*internal motives*".

### Perceived KSAO acquisition through ECAs

All participants (even those who were not active in ECAs) reported the degree to which four types of activities (individual sports, team sports, students' associations or volunteering, and artistic activities) could improve five skills (initiative, creativity, leadership, organization, interpersonal skills) on five-point rating scales, going from "completely disagree" to "completely agree".

## RESULTS

Overall, only 19.8% of students reported not being involved in any ECA. Of the others, 23.4% reported one activity, 34.5% two activities, and 22.3% three activities. Most students were involved in individual sports (58.4%), but fewer were involved in artistic activities (28.9%), team sports (23.4%), and associations or volunteering (21.8%). Descriptive data can be found in Table 1.

We simultaneously tested Hypotheses 1, 2a, and 2b using a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  ANOVA, with the type of motives (internal vs. external) and activity order (initial vs. subsequent ECAs) as within-subject variables, leadership position (leadership vs. no

**TABLE 1**  
Mean, standard deviation, and correlations among main study variables for initial and subsequent ECAs

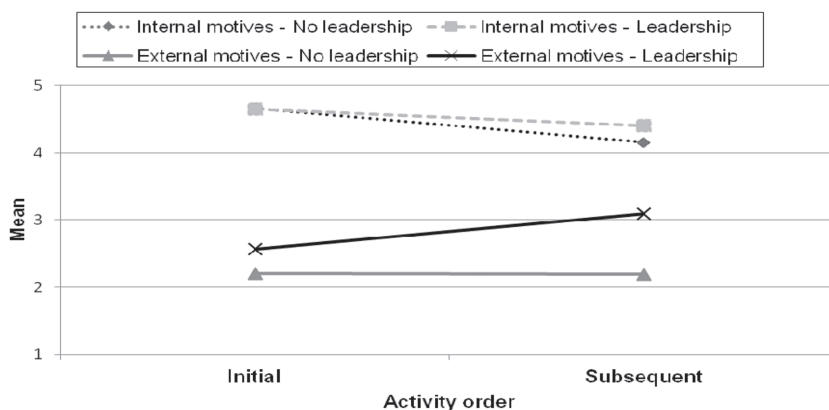
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Initial ECA</i>							
1	Years doing ECA	9.42	5.33	–			
2	Hours spent in ECA	3.97	2.98	.23**	–		
3	Leadership position	.18	.38	.12	.16	–	
4	Internal motives	4.67	.38	.28**	.22**	.08	–
5	External motives	2.42	.88	.10	.22**	.31**	.21**
<i>Subsequent ECAs</i>							
1	Years doing ECA(s)	3.48	2.79	–			
2	Hours spent in ECA(s)	3.21	2.49	.14	–		
3	Leadership position(s)	.36	.48	–.13	.21*	–	
4	Internal motives	4.27	.85	.25**	.13	.05	–
5	External motives	2.62	1.04	–.13	.19	.62**	.19*

*N* = 157 for the initial ECA and *N* = 110 for subsequent ECAs. \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01.

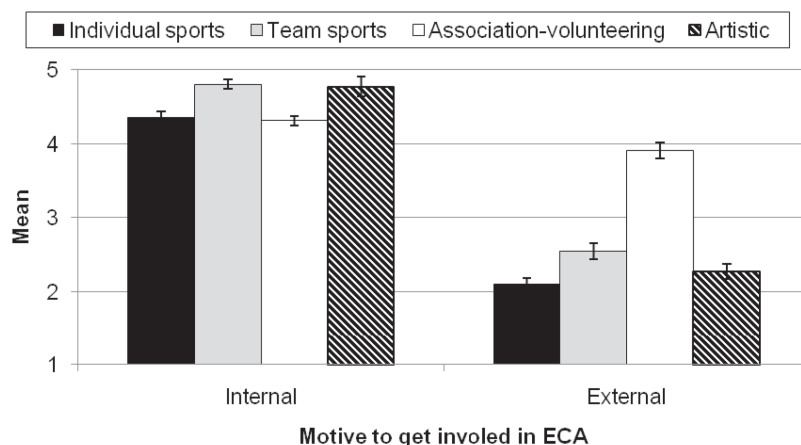
leadership position) as a between-subject variable, and level of motivation as the dependent variable. This analysis was based on students who reported engaging in at least two activities ( $N=110$ ). Results are depicted in Figure 1, and showed a main effect of the type of motives,  $F(1, 108)=661.48, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2=.86$ . Overall, students reported stronger internal ( $M=4.46, SD=.79$ ) than external ( $M=2.50, SD=.96$ ) motives to engage in ECAs, supporting Hypothesis 1. There was no main effect of activity order,  $F(1, 109)=.51, p=.48$ , partial  $\eta^2=.01$ , but a main effect of leadership position,  $F(1, 108)=16.87, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2=.14$ . There was a type of motives by activity order interaction,  $F(1, 108)=18.87, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2=.15$ . External motives were higher for subsequent ( $M=2.62, SD=1.04$ ) than for initial ( $M=2.38, SD=.88$ ) ECAs, while internal motives were higher for initial ( $M=4.66, SD=.73$ ) than for subsequent

( $M=4.27, SD=.85$ ) ECAs, supporting Hypothesis 2a. We also found a leadership position by type of motives interaction,  $F(1, 108)=11.30, p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2=.10$ . External motives were higher for students holding leadership positions ( $M=2.83, SD=1.02$ ) than for those not holding such positions ( $M=2.20, SD=.78$ ), while the difference was smaller for internal motives ( $M=4.53, SD=.66$  vs.  $M=4.41, SD=.88$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2b. In addition, we found a leadership position by activity order interaction,  $F(1, 108)=5.72, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2=.05$ . Finally, there was no three-way interaction,  $F(1, 108)=.99, p=.32$ , partial  $\eta^2=.01$ .

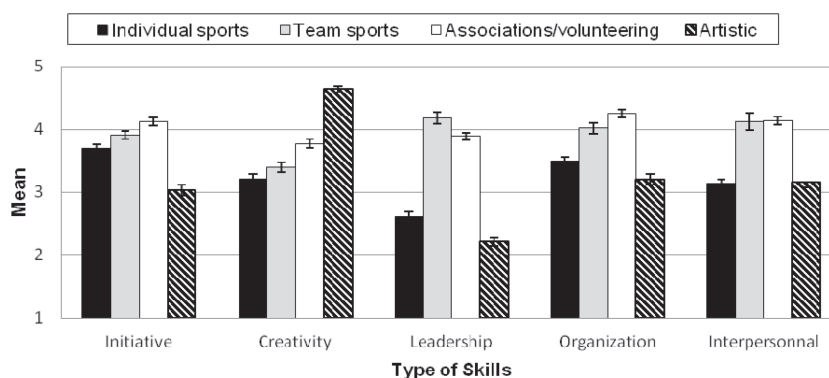
We used a linear mixed-model ANOVA to test Hypothesis 2c, exploring potential differences in internal and external motives for different types of ECAs (individual sports, team sports, association or volunteering, artistic; see Figure 2). Our multi-level model included activities (Level 1) clustered



**Figure 1.** Mean level of internal and external motives to engage in ECAs for initial and subsequent activities for students with and without leadership positions.



**Figure 2.** Mean scores for each type of motive to get involved in ECA for each type of activity, calculated across all activities students were involved in. Error bars indicate one standard error.



**Figure 3.** Mean level of perceived KSAO acquisition for four different types of ECA.  $N=182$  to  $190$ . Error bars indicate one standard error.

within participants (Level 2). Results showed an effect of activity type on internal motives,  $F(3,1285)=7.56$ ,  $p < .001$ . Pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustments revealed that students engaged in association or volunteering activities with similar levels of internal motives as individual sports ( $p=1.00$ ), but lower levels than team sports ( $p < .01$ ) and artistic activities ( $p < .01$ ). Results also showed an effect of activity type on external motives,  $F(3,285)=62.78$ ,  $p < .001$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that students engaged in association or volunteering activities for external motives more than individual sports ( $p < .001$ ), team sports ( $p < .001$ ), and artistic activities ( $p < .001$ ). Hypothesis 2c was thus supported.

We tested Hypothesis 3 (perceived acquisition of KSAOs through associative–volunteering as compared to other types of activities) using repeated-measures ANOVAs for the five types of competencies (see Figure 3). Pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustments were used to compare each type of activity. Results suggest an effect of activity type on the acquisition of initiative skills,  $F(3,174)=40.95$ ,  $p < .001$ . Students perceived associative and volunteering activities to help acquisition of initiative more than individual sports ( $p < .001$ ), team sports ( $p < .05$ ), and artistic activities ( $p < .001$ ). There was also an effect of activity type on the acquisition of creativity skills,  $F(3,176)=118.78$ ,  $p < .001$ . Students perceived artistic activities to help acquisition of creativity more than associative and volunteering activities ( $p < .001$ ). But they perceived associative and volunteering activities to help acquisition of creativity more than individual sports ( $p < .001$ ) and team sports ( $p < .001$ ). Activity type also had an effect on leadership skills,  $F(3,175)=181.68$ ,  $p < .001$ . Students perceived team sports to help acquisition of leadership

skills more than associative and volunteering activities ( $p < .01$ ). But they perceived associative and volunteering activities to help acquisition of leadership skills more than individual sports ( $p < .001$ ) and artistic activities ( $p < .001$ ). Results showed an effect of activity type on organization skills,  $F(3,175)=36.38$ ,  $p < .001$ . Students perceived associative and volunteering activities to help acquisition of organization skills more than individual sports ( $p < .001$ ), team sports ( $p < .05$ ), and artistic activities ( $p < .001$ ). Finally, activity type had an effect on interpersonal skills,  $F(3,177)=32.10$ ,  $p < .001$ . Students perceived associative and volunteering activities to help acquisition of interpersonal skills as much a team sports ( $p=1$ ), but more than individual sports ( $p < .001$ ) or artistic activities ( $p < .001$ ). Together, these results partly support Hypothesis 3.

## DISCUSSION

When perusing résumés of today's young applicants, recruiters often find similar education credentials and job-related experiences, making traditional screening an increasingly difficult task (Thoms et al., 1999). They may thus start to focus on other features of résumés to distinguish among applicants, such as ECAs (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Rubin et al., 2002). Yet we still know little about what KSAOs applicants really develop during ECAs, what makes them get involved in these activities, and how they use such activities in relation to the labour market.

We found that students participate in ECAs mainly out of internal motives, but that some are also influenced by external motives (e.g., résumé-building motives). Such results correspond to previous findings with volunteering activities

(e.g., Handy et al., 2010; Hustinx et al., 2010), suggesting that participation involves a combination of motives. Moreover, students' motives may evolve over time. Students generally reported engaging in their earlier (i.e., initial) activity during early adolescence (i.e., they were involved in the activity for more than nine years on average), when the labour market was probably not yet a main concern for them. For these activities, internal motives were central. Students reported engaging in subsequent activities for around 3.5 years on average, and thus closer to entering the labour market. In this later situation, students have to deal with the increasing pressure of finding a job after graduation. Students may develop various strategies to manage this pressure (Brown & Hesketh, 2004), and one strategy could involve using ECAs to demonstrate their qualities (e.g., soft skills or leadership abilities) to future employers (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Tomlinson, 2008). Our data showed that external motives (e.g., résumé-building) are stronger for activities started closer to entering the labour market. This difference may thus be due to (some) students applying such an ECA-based strategy in response to increasing market pressure. Yet students may also differ in their overall orientation toward the job market (Tomlinson, 2007) or motives for personal development. Future research should examine such factors as potential predictors of engagement in ECAs or as potential moderators of the relationship between job market pressure and external motivation to engage in ECAs.

Furthermore, the ECA-based strategy seems to be mainly adopted by students holding leadership positions in their activities. These students reported stronger external motives, especially for activities started later. Students may be aware that employers are actually looking for more than a list of activities; i.e., active participation (Feldman Barr & McNeilly, 2002). However, our results are cross-sectional and these interpretations are subject to caution. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to examine more precisely how people's motives evolve.

Moreover, students involved in associative or volunteering activities reported stronger external motives than students involved in other types of activities. These results are consistent with recent findings (Handy et al., 2010; Hustinx et al., 2010; Roulin & Bangerter, 2011). Thus, some students do apply an ECA-based strategy to add value to their credentials in response to the increasing labour market pressure (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Tomlinson, 2008). But those students may primarily choose to invest their time and energy in

associative or volunteering activities; that is, types of ECAs particularly valued by recruiters (Chia, 2005; Nemanick & Clark, 2002).

Finally, students perceive that different types of activities may help them to acquire different KSAOs. For instance, artistic activities were perceived to develop creativity, but not leadership skills. On the other hand, team sports were perceived to develop leadership skills, but less creativity. Associative or volunteering activities represent a good trade-off for students, who perceive them as a good way to help develop numerous skills (i.e., initiative, creativity, leadership abilities, organization abilities, and interpersonal skills). For students' involvement in ECAs to constitute an efficient signal, students and recruiters should agree on what skills are acquired through what type of ECAs. Students' perceptions regarding the value of associative or volunteering activities seem to correspond to recruiters', who see applicants engaged in these activities as having more leadership or interpersonal skills (Brown & Campion, 1994). Yet we only measured perceptions of skill acquisition and not actual acquisition. Past research showed that students can acquire valuable skills through ECAs, but did not distinguish between activity types (Howard, 1986) or focused on one specific type of ability or skill (Rubin et al., 2002). Moreover, there may also be differences between activities of the same type (e.g., between two student associations) regarding what KSAOs students may develop or what inferences recruiters may make from such experiences when reading résumés. Our results therefore call for additional research to investigate what KSAOs are actually acquired through participation in various ECAs and how recruiters interpret ECAs when evaluating résumés.

This study has practical implications for recruiters who try to infer KSAOs from applicants' ECAs when screening résumés. Students may develop useful abilities and skills (or more generally the "KSA" part) in ECAs, independently of the type of motives leading to their involvement. Recruiters may thus safely use ECAs in résumés to infer KSAs and assess person–job fit. But, personality, values or motivation (i.e., the "O" part) that recruiters generally infer from ECAs (Cole et al., 2009; Handy et al., 2010) may not correspond to the true characteristics of students involved for external motives. For instance, some people who volunteer more for the résumé than to help others may not be especially altruistic people. Therefore, recruiters should be careful when assessing person–organization fit using ECAs. They should realize that labour market pressure

is a key component of applicants' involvement in ECAs and integrate this factor in their evaluation process. Also, they should evaluate differently applicants involved in different types of activities or having different roles within the activity. ECA-based inferences may influence the first step of the selection process (i.e., résumé screening), but other factors may have more impact on hiring decisions in later steps (e.g., applicants' performance during interviews or at assessment centers).

This study has some additional limitations. First, our results are based on self-reported behaviors from a small sample of students from a French-speaking Swiss university. Different results might have been found in other countries, for instance where ECAs are valued differently by employers (Hustinx et al., 2010), or with different measurement methods. Future research should try to replicate these findings in other settings. Also, our sample is composed of business and law students. Our results may therefore not generalize to other fields of study, especially those where competition on the labour market is less intense. Further studies may want to explore other samples.

Our study shows that students' motives to engage in ECAs may evolve as they come closer to the labour market, and that they respond to the increasing competitive pressure by engaging in activities that recruiters value (i.e., associative or volunteering activities, leadership positions). Organizations and recruiters may want to consider that students tend not to engage in ECAs purely out of passion or interest, but also to add value to their credentials and match employers' expectations.

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