

How to Get Involved with Student Organizations (and why it's important)

[00:00:00] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:00:00] Hi, everyone. Welcome back to the launch podcast. This is Kayla Hogrefe, academic advisor for the school of business on the Hartford campus.

[00:00:16] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:00:16] And I am Emma Bjorngard-Basayne, academic advisor in the school of business at the Stamford campus.

[00:00:21] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:00:21] We have an exciting episode today for you, or we're going to be talking about the importance of experiential learning and what exactly that phrase means.

[00:00:30] But basically we are going to be talking a little bit about getting engaged in student organizations and clubs. And what you can expect to learn through that engagement. We interview Nikki Garcia, who is a former staff member within the school of business who now works for UConn student activities. So she is the best of all worlds.

[00:00:50] She knows about business and business students. And she also has that practical knowledge of how to get involved and the practical steps that you can take [00:01:00] to either start a student organization or get involved in a student organization.

[00:01:04] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:01:04] We wanted to talk to Nikki about how to get engaged on campus because by getting engaged and, you know, joining clubs and organizations, you can really build skills that will help you in the future.

[00:01:17] So, if you think about, you know, that the goal of say getting an internship, then you also have to ask yourself, like, why would someone give you an internship? And you want to be able to demonstrate to that person that you have the skills that they're looking for and getting engaged and joining an organization and club or a club can really give you those skills.

[00:01:38] So Kayla, what do you think would be some skills that you can gain by, you know, maybe having a leadership position in an organization or club?

[00:01:45] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:01:45] You definitely learn how to work with many different diverse groups of people you improve your communication skills. Time management is, Nikki, will talk about this in the episode. You definitely have to have strong time management [00:02:00] skills because you're presumably a full-time student at the same time as you're helping manage a student organization

[00:02:07] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:02:07] for me, I remember cause I was a transfer student as an undergrad. So the school I, you know, graduated from, wasn't the one that I started at.

[00:02:16] So for me, joining. At that point, the philosophy club was very helpful in just making social connections on campus and like getting to know the community as well. So it gave me practice to kind of step outside of my comfort zone and make connections with people I hadn't, you know, engaged with and interacted with before.

[00:02:34] So I think that's a skill too. Like it pushes you to be social and, you know, step outside of your comfort zone and talk to new people.

[00:02:44] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:02:44] Another thing that I just thought of Emma is a lot of times it's a student's, maybe their first experience dealing with kind of bureaucratic or procedural requirements that will inevitably be a part of working in any sort of job [00:03:00] or organization later on after you graduate or while you're interning as a student.

[00:03:04] The other thing I want to say is that if you are a student who wants to get involved and doesn't know where to start, this is the podcast episode for you because Nikki makes it so accessible and just tells you exactly what your first steps are to either start your own student organization. If there isn't one that you see that you're interested in at the university, or just how to take that first step and see what's out there and joined an already existing student organization.

[00:03:31] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:03:31] Yeah. Cause one thing that I was thinking about too, is that. You know, sometimes different academic departments, they will say highlight the club that goes with a major, right. Through their departmental website, there are so many clubs and organizations that you can get involved with. And we'll talk about those that relate to interests you have outside of the classroom, like a specific show that you like a specific.

[00:03:54] You know, sports that you're into all those things. There's most likely a club or [00:04:00] organization that you can join and meet other people that share your interests. So let's talk to Nikki.

[00:04:15] what is your name and what do you do at UConn?

[00:04:17] **Nicole Garcia:** [00:04:17] My name is Nikki Garcia, and I'm a program assistant for student activities. And I work with both the community outreach side and the leadership and organizational development side. And so that basically means I get a little bit of the behind the scenes work for service projects, volunteer opportunities.

[00:04:35] We offer leadership legacy events and the clubs and org support.

[00:04:40] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:04:40] But, you worked for a little bit with the school of business, right? So you're familiar with me Emma and our business students.

[00:04:47] Yes. I was

[00:04:49] **Nicole Garcia:** [00:04:49] thinking about this the other day, because I'm coming up on a year with the student activities. And just before that for about six months, I was with the school of business and did all sorts of stuff [00:05:00] with you all.

[00:05:01] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:05:01] So how does involvement and involvement with student organizations in particular contribute to learning in your opinion?

[00:05:09] **Nicole Garcia:** [00:05:09] There's a lot of organizations at UConn as with most universities. I'm sure that combine academics and fun if you will. So in that sense, there's a

pretty. Easy correlation to what you're learning in your classes and how to apply that in the real world with your experience with your club.

[00:05:30] So it enhances your classroom experience, which is awesome. I think, I don't want to say that you learn more outside of the classroom than inside of the classroom, but I definitely think enhances the right word because it builds on that significantly. And I think if we're looking across. All different types of clubs by joining a student organization and getting involved, you learn about yourself, you learn all sorts of different skills, leadership skills, you meet new people, you engage with others or in something [00:06:00] that inspires you or interests you.

[00:06:02] And so there's a lot of benefits. To joining a student organization.

[00:06:06] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:06:06] So you just answered this a little bit in that previous question, but my next question was why should students join clubs and organizations? Like what specific type of skills do you see students gaining, or what specific benefits do you see for students to join student organizations?

[00:06:23] **Nicole Garcia:** [00:06:23] I think one of the biggest ones that students don't think about. And I particularly think business students might be intrigued and interested in is the networking opportunities that come with joining a club and organization, especially being one of the folks in the organization that might be responsible for the outreach or planning that.

[00:06:41] And I know we'll get into that in a little bit, but when you're a member of this. The student club, you have the chance to venture out and you have the chance to collaborate and work with others that you might not normally have the chance to just in your academic program. And so one thing that I think students really [00:07:00] benefit from and is a huge draw is.

[00:07:02] This opportunity to network outside of the university within the university, your classroom experience is really great and your syllabus is pretty straightforward of outlines of things and the people you're going to get to work with. And this club or outside organization just enhances those opportunities, tenfold, and you get to work with all sorts of folks that you might not have otherwise.

[00:07:25] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:07:25] So, you know, some of our students, they are new to UConn. They might not have joined a club before, or maybe they, you know, have been at UConn for a while, but they just don't have experience with, through, to an organization. So could you talk a little bit about what clubs do and organizations do when they meet?

[00:07:44] **Nicole Garcia:** [00:07:44] I mean, we know that it could differ a little bit between the clubs, but like an example or two would be great. Absolutely. So there's over 700 clubs and organizations registered UConn, which blows my mind. And of course is such a [00:08:00] great thing that we offer. It can be a little bit overwhelming, I think, especially for new students coming to campus that have this general idea of, I know that I want to get involved.

[00:08:11] 700 can kind of seem overwhelming, but all of that to say that that means that there really is. So much happening and there are lots of interesting groups to be a part of. And so if there is TV show, you like, if there's food you like to make, there's a club, that's going to do those things. So I think a lot of times people think that it's a meeting and you sit around and you plan things.

[00:08:35] And of course that happens, but there are lots of events that are hosted there's fundraisers. There's you know, the creation of marketing materials. So if that's a skill you're looking to develop there's panels, movie nights, there's a heck of a lot of things that student orgs hosts. And I think that, you know, sometimes again in the beginning it can be simple to think [00:09:00] I'm going to join this club.

[00:09:01] We're going to have meetings and that'll be that, but they do so much more. And so I would encourage anyone interested in joining one to just be open to the idea that. It might be much more than you bargain for in a good way. You know, if you're interested in sword fighting, maybe they're practicing sword fighting on the weekend or baking again, you know, they might be baking or watching the office.

[00:09:21] If there's an office club interest group, I know there's a lot of star Wars and I'm not into that whole scene, but you know, shows like that. There's plenty of groups that get together and. Watch all of those series all over again. And so it's much more than meetings. It's a lot of fun stuff too.

[00:09:39] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:09:39] When does the office club meet? Because I would like to start a staff one.

[00:09:47] **Nicole Garcia:** [00:09:47] I'm very interested in staff club talking about the office. I'm very sad that they took it off of Netflix.

[00:09:54] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:09:54] Devastating. How does a student get involved with an already existing organization?

[00:10:00] [00:09:59] **Nicole Garcia:** [00:09:59] On the student activities page, there is the option to go to, contact.

[00:10:05] You can also just search for UConn, you contact. And there is a whole database of all the organizations. So there's very clearly a tab outline that says organizations. Once you get to the you contact page and it brings up all 700 organizations. 700 plus that we have. And so you can search any keyword that you think might be interesting.

[00:10:27] For example, you can type in plants. If you're interested in learning any more about houseplant club or plants that would survive in your residence hall room, you can type in a TV show name, and you'll find the clubs that are gathering to watch or discuss various TV shows. Coffee clubs, things like that.

[00:10:44] And so if you're interested in something, but don't know where to start you contact is by far the best resource for you to pop in and be able to kind of toy around in there and see what offerings we have. Another opportunity we have for [00:11:00] students

to join organization other than going directly. So you contact page a and finding contact information.

[00:11:06] That way is to attend the involvement fair. We have those at the start of fall semester and spring semester. And it's basically really a chance for new students or even students who have been here a while, but are trying to get involved in a new semester to come and do like a little dating session.

[00:11:25] We'll call it speed dating and in a in-person. This semester in the past, we've seen that planned out as a wall to wall or table to table set up outside of the student union, where you just see all these organizations gathered with their student leaders behind. Ready to answer your questions. And talk about what it is that they do and how they feel, you know, their meeting times, what they do for events, things like that.

[00:11:52] In our virtual world, we have transitioned to more zoom and obviously engagement in that way. [00:12:00] It looks a little different. You have to sign up typically in advance. To have either a table there or to attend now day of you can of course, sign up and pop into one of those involvement fairs. It's not super strict, but there are extra steps involved to our virtual involvement fairs that typically you wouldn't necessarily have to do in an in-person fair when they were noticing in the virtual world, is that you can pop in and out of different rooms and chat with student leaders.

[00:12:28] From all different organizations over the course of 10 minutes. Whereas when you're on Fairfield way, you might have to wait a little bit longer in person to talk with a representative from that organization. So there's pros and Cons, but we've noticed that you know, participation and the types of information that you're getting in both are going to be equal.

[00:12:46] Regional campus students can attend their involvement fair right on their campus involvement fairs virtually for regional campus. Students look similar as well, so they can pop in and out of their zoom rooms. And so the [00:13:00] description of an involvement fair for regional or Storrs students, campuses look very similar, which is great.

[00:13:06] Especially now there's a lot of crossover and collaboration we're noticing, which is very beneficial for both regional and storrs students.

[00:13:14] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:13:14] So just to clarify Nikki organizations aren't only limited to students that are attending that campus. Right? So for example, in a normal semester, I have a lot of Hartford students who live on the store's campus or take one or two classes on the storrs campus. They can join storrs, student organizations, even though they're hartford campus students. Right?

[00:13:33] **Nicole Garcia:** [00:13:33] Correct. They can join. The club itself or the organization itself does have a home base, if you will. And 51% of the club or organization has to be from the home base. So your participants for the most part have to be from that one location, but then you can, of course fill in and have some representatives from all campuses.

[00:13:54] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:13:54] Well, we know that there are different leadership positions that students can hold. Could you talk a [00:14:00] little bit about the different leadership positions and maybe discuss also a little bit why students should consider running for a leadership position?

[00:14:09] **Nicole Garcia:** [00:14:09] Absolutely. So there are four main positions, leadership positions, and every student org. And you'll notice if you go to register your student organization, those are required pretty straightforward. President position, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. And again, all organizations are required to have those.

[00:14:26] There's also org specific roles. So maybe a club wants someone specifically designated to be their recruitment coordinator. Nadir that role may exist for one particular club, someone overseeing fundraising or PR, but generally speaking, the only required roles and ones that we see across all organizations are those four roles, specifically our solid program.

[00:14:51] I'll break that down. So solid is actually an acronym. If you go to the UConn webpage, you can type in UConn solid. It will come up. But it is our student [00:15:00] organization leaders intentional development, which is a mouthful. But I think, I think it's important to note what it stands for, because it really is this intentional training for our officers.

[00:15:11] And so it's an in-depth tool that breaks down your. Specific position roles. So it talks about budgeting and how to actually manage money. If you're taking the treasurer training it talks about your organization value values, and the type of culture you're creating talks about leadership event planning outside of the solid specific training of courses, student leader, you're going to get all sorts of exposure to different things.

[00:15:39] Like time management as an officer is going to look. Way different than if you're just a participant or a member budgeting, again, conflict resolution, those networking opportunities. So I think it's wildly beneficial to just join an organization, but then when you take that extra step and you become a student leader of that [00:16:00] organization, You kind of get the inside scoop of how to run something even on a micro level.

[00:16:05] And I think when you're talking to school of business students, that's huge. That's a great resume builder to be able to say that you ran this mini group on campus. Sometimes not so many, but. Really you make something your own and you get to share that back out to either a grad school or an employer. So I think it's an awesome opportunity if our students get a chance to run for something, to be able to do that.

[00:16:30] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:16:30] Nikki say a student browses all 700 plus registered student organizations and they just. Don't find something that they're interested in, or they have a very specific interest around which they'd like to start a new organization. What are some practical steps or maybe even just a first step they could take to get that ball rolling?

[00:16:51] **Nicole Garcia:** [00:16:51] So again, I would definitely recommend Che checking out UConncontact first to make sure your interest is not one of those 700 gloves. [00:17:00] Because again, that is an insane number. In a good way, but if you're still finding that there's

not something that quite meets your needs or your interests, and you have a small group of others that you want to start this with, there are definitely some steps you can take.

[00:17:14] So you do need eight full-time students to create a club. So seven other people have to also want this very specific niche that you have not found quite yet at UConn, which is totally fine. And then again, half just over half of those students. So 51% of those students have to be from your primary campus. So maybe you have friends at some other campuses, but wherever you're starting that organization, you need to have the most for the majority number of students coming from there. Then regardless of what your interest is, there are some things that we require your club to have that. So you're for leadership positions, you're president vice president treasurer, secretary, you need a mission, a purpose, and you need an advisor.

[00:17:57] So you need to have someone on campus in a faculty or [00:18:00] staff position. That's going to act as the advisor for your organization. And that just kind of helps you with accountability. There are some ongoing trainings check-ins that you have to do with the leadership office in student activities. And so your advisors just kind of there to remind you to do those things, to remind you, to get your paperwork in, they might have to sign off on one or two things over the course of an entire year.

[00:18:19] But it's a really great for you to also, you know, get in contact with someone that works as a faculty or staff member within UConn. For your own professional benefit as well. You also, then we'll go through the workshops in solid. Like I had mentioned if you are in one of those leadership roles, so at least a couple of you will be getting specified training on how to make sure that you can stay an active club on campus.

[00:18:44] So yes, we have 700 clubs on campus. And they fluctuate between being active and inactive. And basically that just means you're checking in with our office and you're keeping up with our standards. And when we get to make sure that all the clubs are, you know, meeting our UConn expectations. [00:19:00] After you have this idea, you have your group, you found your advisors and you've outlined your goals, the last step is that someone from the involvement office or your specific campus will be reaching out to you to set up a new organization meeting. And at that point, they'll review your application, the direction of your organization, what specific category you're in again.

[00:19:23] So we can kind of group some organizations together, make it easier to find things you're interested in, and then just finalize the requirements for you to be active and remain active. And so then once you're approved, You've met all your requirements. You'll be good to go. And if anything changes or we need anything from you, you'll always get plenty of time to complete that from our office.

[00:19:42] If you want to review any of this information again, I definitely definitely would recommend you go to [solid.UConn.edu](https://solid.uconn.edu). And again, all of the dropdown menus at the top are pretty self-explanatory. You'll click down on registered student organizations, [00:20:00] RSO you'll follow those steps on creating a student organization, or again, you can go to UConncontact at UConn and search organizations that already exist, but both of those resources are where you can find just about anything. If for some reason you can't, you can always

email me or someone from the leadership office. Our meet the staff page on student activities is pretty comprehensive.

[00:20:21] If you have. Specific question, but again, if you want to just reach out to me, you can do that as well. Nicole.3.Garcia@UConn.edu is where you can find me.

[00:20:31] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:20:31] Thank you. And again, I'll put the links that you mentioned in the episode notes. The students can

[00:20:35] access them.

[00:20:37] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:20:37] Can I ask one last question? Can you tell us and the listeners, if you were involved in any clubs as an undergrad?

[00:20:45] **Nicole Garcia:** [00:20:45] As an undergrad, I was involved in many clubs and organizations, which is why I ended up going into student activities now as an adult, because it's where I really found so much enjoyment. I was involved in a sorority. So that was an [00:21:00] organization that was near and dear to my heart. I was involved in student government. I was a women's Senator. I was all about girl power. Then I'm all about girl power now. And I was involved in a student interpreting group, which was my career in another life. But I did find that was the most closely correlated to my academic program at the time.

[00:21:18] So I had a little bit of purely social group, organization involvement, a little bit of political involvement. And then one that kind of had some academic involvement as well. So did a little bit of everything, which is why I'm so passionate about getting students involved and finding their club or organization now.

[00:21:39] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:21:39] So that was Nikki Garcia. And I loved talking to her Emma and especially listening back to our conversation. I remember all of the clubs and organizations that I was involved in as an undergrad and the great experiences I had and the things that I learned through that involvement. What about you?

[00:22:00] [00:21:59] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:21:59] Yeah. As I mentioned in the introduction, you know, like I joined the philosophy club as an undergrad and he was just, you know, the best experience.

[00:22:08] I remember we had like a bonfire on the beach the first night that I I guess it was the first week of school. So I was like introduced into the club right after the club fair that we had. So I already. Made friends kind of like almost not before classes started, but right in the beginning. So that was really nice. Cause then, you know, once they came to having like group projects, like I had met some of these people before, so that was definitely something that I appreciated, like the social aspect of it. And then the second semester, Sure. And that was my junior year. I decided to run for a leadership position. So I ended up being eventually like the vice president of the philosophy club, which at the time, you know, it was something I was like so proud of because, you know, I am kind of like an introvert. So I had to step outside of my comfort zone and it also helped me like learn a bunch of new skills, like making, you know, promotional [00:23:00] materials. You know, public speaking skills,

because I had to like introduce guests that we had that came to speak to the club members and things like that. That really helped me grow as a person.

[00:23:11] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:23:11] Some of the organizations that I was involved in as an undergraduate, were I was involved in intramural sports, which sometimes we forget is a student organization where you could learn really valuable skills. And not only did I meet friends and. Learn about time management and all of those things through my involvement with sports, but it was also a great outlet for what if you're like stressed out with your academics or your classes, or you needed to blow off some steam after studying all day

[00:23:41] I just like during my college semester, sometimes I would like live to go play an intramural soccer game at nine o'clock at night, which. Right now seems crazy that I used to do that. I can't imagine picking up and playing soccer from like nine to 10 30 at night. And then I was also involved in a co-ed honors fraternity Phi Sigma Pi.

[00:24:00] [00:23:59] If you want to look it up, it's still around at UConn and I was the webmaster for that organization, which may or may not surprise you. So I definitely learned some really valuable. Skills that translate to work that I do now. And that led to different jobs. I had within information technology as a student and after.

[00:24:20] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:24:20] Yeah. And I can kind of just, you know, add to that one thing that was very helpful for me. So I went straight to grad school after my undergrad. So having the leadership experience through the philosophy club at. Cal state long beach was really viable for my resume when it came to applying for graduate school.

[00:24:41] And I know Nikki mentioned that in the episode and I, I wanted to make sure to make a point that it was very beneficial. So if you're planning on going to graduate school, getting involved as an undergrad is definitely something that you should look into.

[00:24:56] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:24:56] Well, we hope that you learned a lot and felt inspired from this [00:25:00] podcast episode, please keep an eye on your email. There's a lot of information coming out every semester about involvement, fairs, like we just discussed in the episode and we would love to see you start or expand your involvement and gain some more experiential learning. .