

# The Cost of Commitment: Extracurriculars and Academic Stress Among UCSD Students

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## Background

- Academic stress** is a response to influences like course load demands, time insufficiency, and pressure to succeed<sup>1,2</sup>
- Negative health impact of academic stress:
  - Lower motivation<sup>3</sup>
  - Lower life satisfaction<sup>3</sup>
  - Less academic fulfillment<sup>4</sup>
- Extracurricular activities** are activities completed outside an academic schedule<sup>1</sup>
  - 60% of students in a UC wide survey reported involvement in at least one extracurricular activity<sup>5</sup>
- Limited studies examine the role of extracurriculars as a sole exposure or stressor in relation to perceived academic stress



## Objective

To examine the relationship between on-campus extracurricular activity participation and perceived academic stress among UCSD undergraduate students



## Methods

- Type of study:** Cross-sectional study
- Target population:** Undergraduate students at UCSD recruited via flyers, social media, direct outreach (**N = 71**)
- Measure:** Anonymous online survey collected over a 5-week period (April - May 2025) via Qualtrics
- Exposure:** On-campus extracurricular activities and hours of involvement
  - Including athletic, Greek/social, pre-professional, philanthropic, cultural, and arts/media clubs
- Outcome:** *Perceived Academic Stress Scale*<sup>6</sup>
  - 18-item with a composite score from 0-70
  - 5-Likert scale (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Very Often)
- Statistical analyses:**
  - Spearman's correlation test and One-Way ANOVA performed via SPSS v29

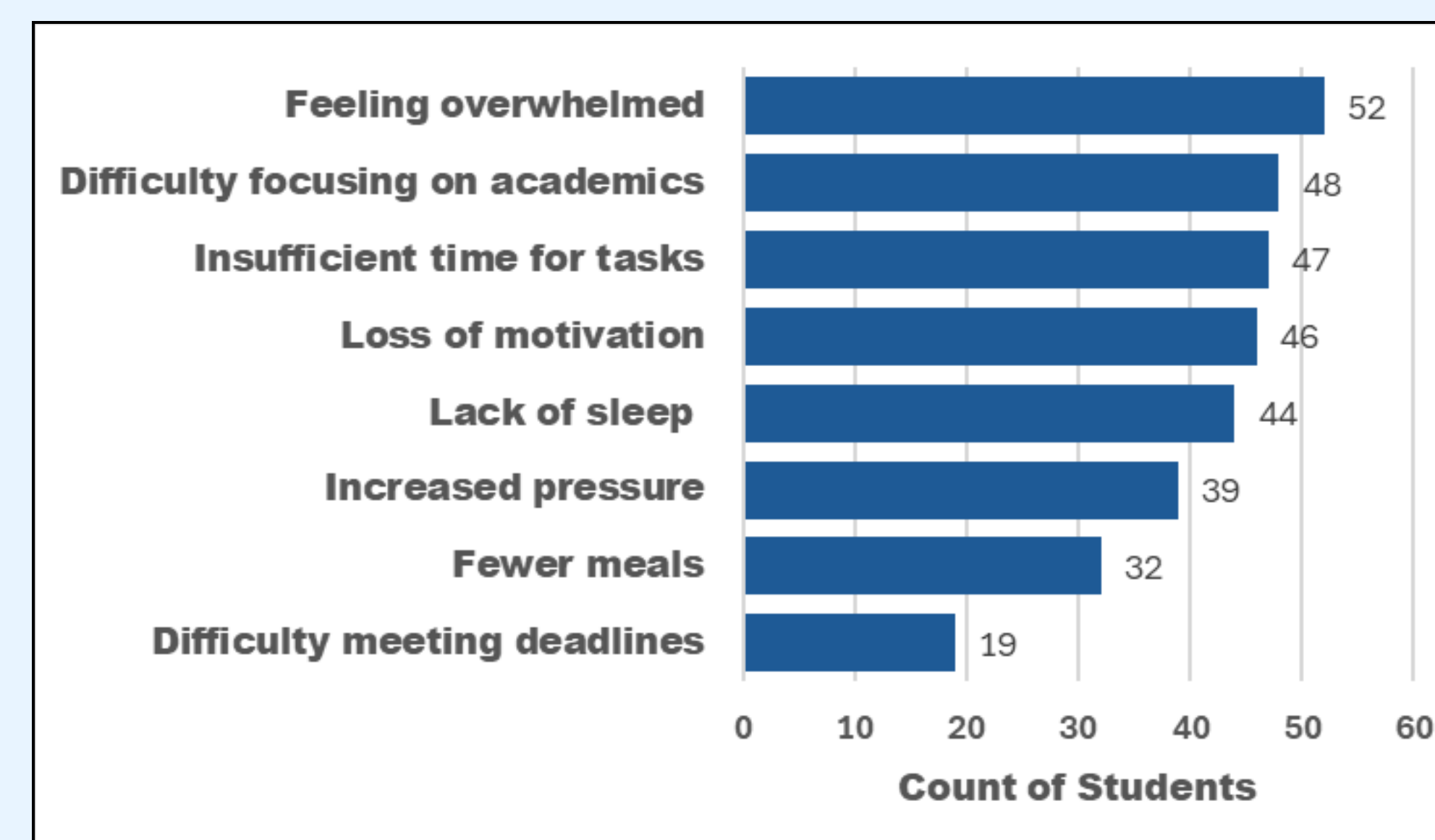


## Results

**Table 1. Sample Demographics (N=71)**

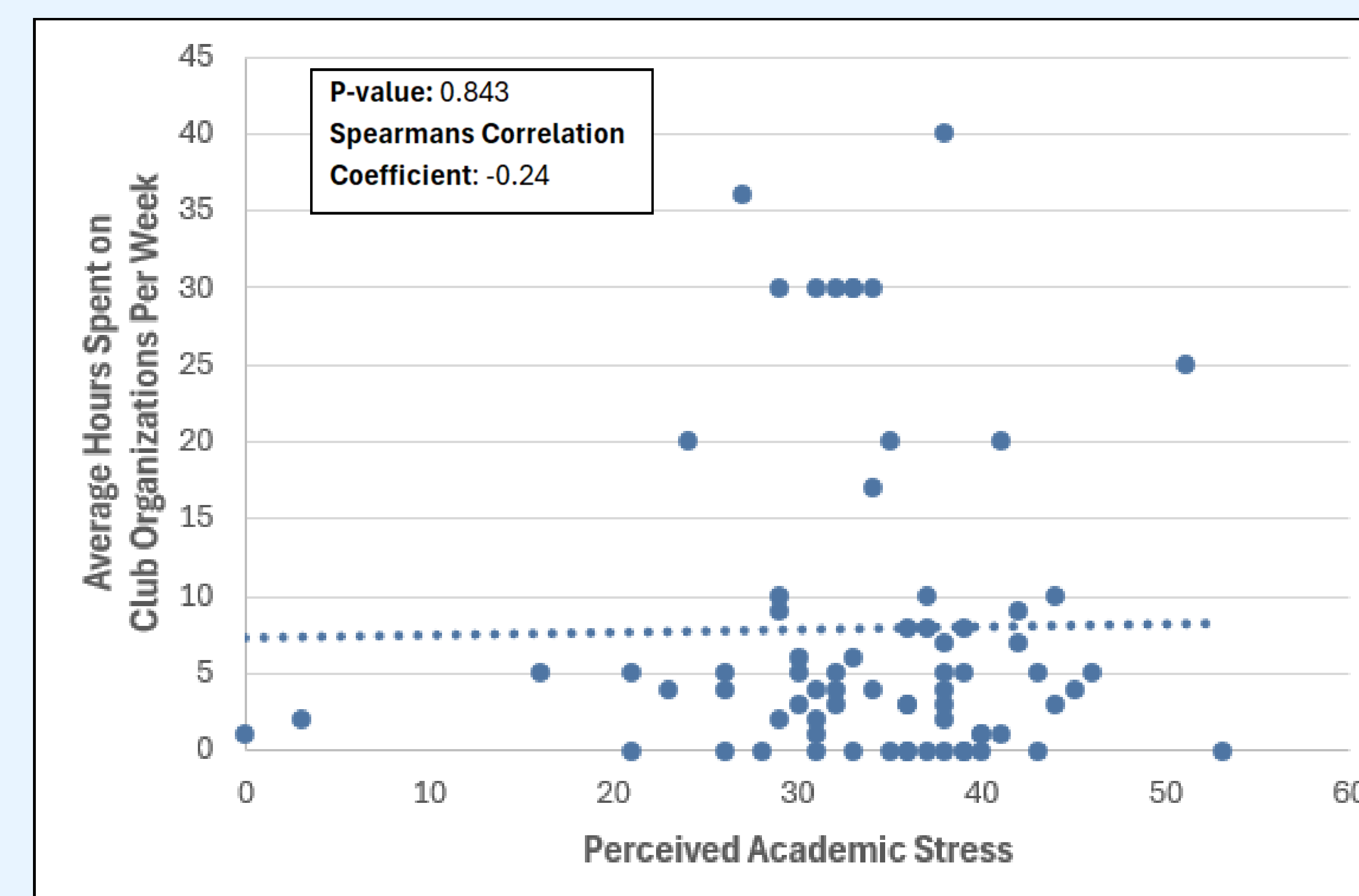
Gender	n (%)
Female	36 (50.7)
Male	35 (49.3)
Age	
18-19	25 (35.2)
20-21	32 (45.0)
22-23	14 (19.7)
Class Year	
1st Year (Freshman)	24 (33.8)
2nd Year (Sophomore)	5 (7.0)
3rd Year (Junior)	18 (25.4)
4th Year (Senior)	24 (33.8)
Race/Ethnicity	
White	20 (28.2)
Asian	16 (22.5)
Latino/Hispanic	11 (15.5)
Middle Eastern	5 (7.0)
African American	1 (1.4)
Native American	1 (1.4)
Pacific Islander	1 (1.4)
Mixed Race/Ethnicity	16 (22.5)
Number of Clubs Participated In	
Zero	8 (11.3)
One	34 (47.9)
Two	19 (26.8)
Three	8 (11.3)
Four	2 (2.8)
Ever Used On-Campus Mental Health Resources	
Yes	13 (18.3)
Ever Used On-Campus Academic Counseling	
Yes	30 (42.3)
Stress Level	
Mean (S.D.)	33.8 (8.8)

**Figure 3. Report of Perceived Challenges While Balancing Clubs and Academics**



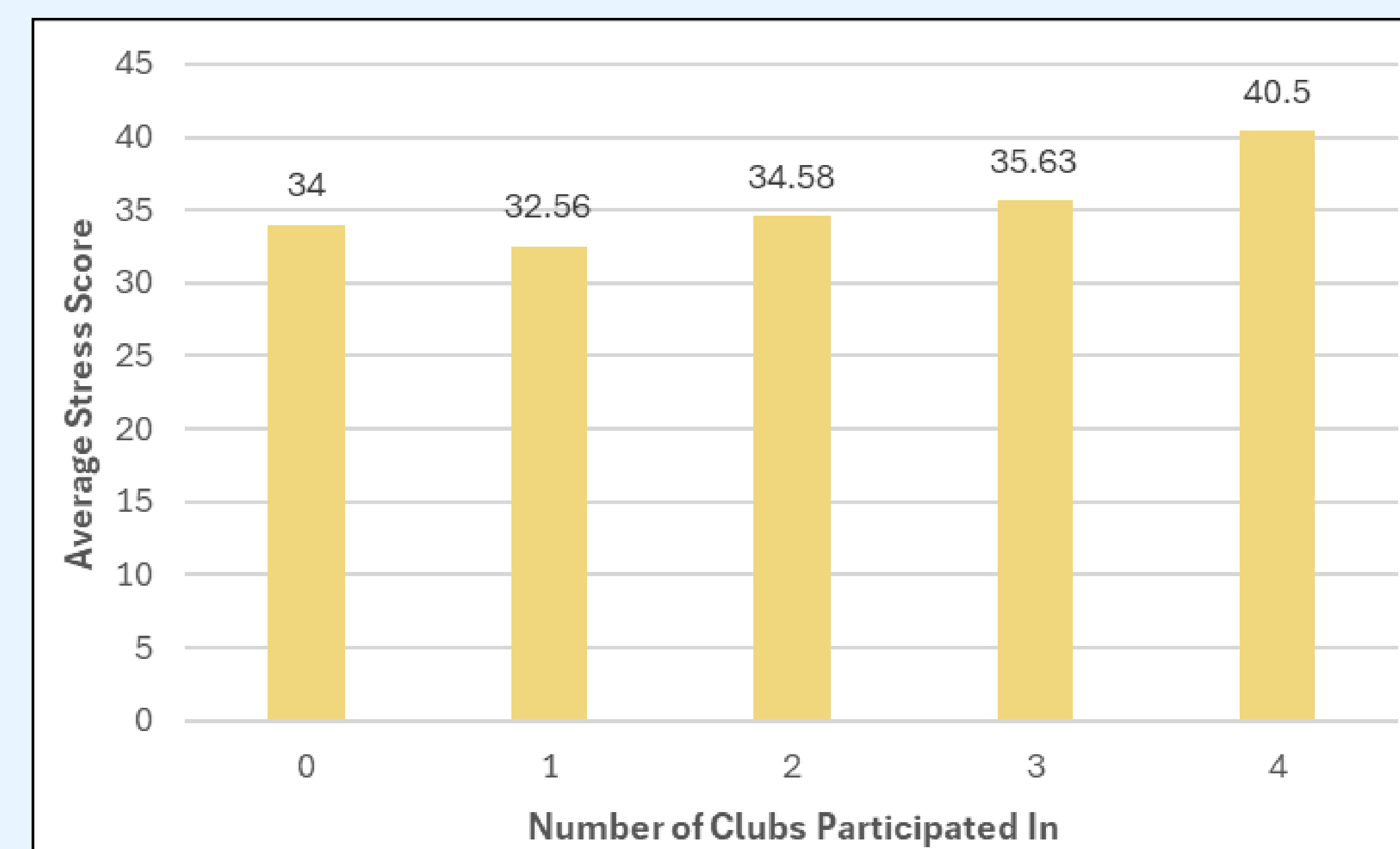
\*The **most frequently reported challenge** among UCSD undergraduate students was feelings of being overwhelmed

**Figure 1. Correlation Between Average Hours Spent on Extracurricular Activities Per Week and Perceived Academic Stress Score**



\***Perceived Academic Stress Score** = Mean 33.8, S.D. 8.8  
 \***Average Extracurricular Hours** = Mean 8.1, S.D. 10.2  
 \*No statistically significant difference between hours spent on clubs/organizations and perceived academic stress score (**p = 0.843**)  
 \***Weak negative** correlation between hours spent on clubs/organizations and perceived academic stress score (**r = -0.24**)

**Figure 2. Average Stress Score by Number of Clubs Participated In**



\*ANOVA results showed no statistically significant difference in the average stress scores between number of club groups (**F = 0.575, p = 0.682**)



## Conclusions

- More hours spent on clubs per week is not associated with greater perceived stress
  - Further research could indicate if they are a stress reliever
- Participating in more clubs is not necessarily associated with more perceived stress
- Similar to prior research, our study identified perceived barriers when balancing clubs with academic demands, such as:<sup>3,4</sup>
  - Feeling overwhelmed
  - Difficulty focusing on academics
  - Insufficient time for tasks
- Most UCSD undergraduate students have never used on-campus mental health or academic counseling resources
- Limitations may include response bias and small sample size



## Policy Implications

- More promotion of CAPS services on social media to target students that are not involved in clubs
- CAPS and Student Health Services providing additional online services to accommodate various student schedules
- Targeting clubs to advertise workshops with CAPS to increase access and awareness for mental health resources

## Acknowledgments

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## References



Scan the QR code for references & additional information!