

# **Campus Recreation Worldwide: A Literature Review**

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## **Abstract**

The percentage of adults who engage in regular leisure time physical activity is decreasing, causing an increase in risk for several health issues. Research indicates that the more physically active individuals are in their leisure time as adolescents and young adults, the more likely they are to remain active throughout the lifespan. The number of individuals entering the college or university setting has continued to increase over the past decade. Institutions of higher education are supporting the construction and management of large recreational facilities on-campus for college students to use for leisure time physical activity behaviors. Many administrators are aware of the benefits of participation in leisure time physical activity among college students including: higher grades, less stress, better adjustment and higher persistence to graduation. Given the increase in popularity of comprehensive campus recreation programs and facilities, there is a need for theory based research to bridge the gap in assessing participation and developing intervention and educational materials to increase participation.

**Key words:** Leisure time, recreation, Campus recreation

## **Introduction**

Apart from increasing physical activity as one of the factors to combat obesity, physical activity has also been associated with a healthier self-image, lower stress levels (Harrison & Narayan, 2003), improved self-esteem (Ransdell, Dratt, Kennedy, O'Neill & DeVoe, 2001) and maintenance of overall physical health (World Health Organisation, 2010).

There have been several studies that hypothesized that the determinants of physical activity participation are physiological, social, ecological and psychological (Hutson, Guerra & Neckerman, 2009).

Involvement in physical activity as one dimension of leisure has become an area of growing interest in recent years. Researchers have begun to recognise the importance of participation in sports and physical activity and, consequently, there has been an increase in the number of studies related to this area (Trail et al., 2002). Specifically, participation in physical and outdoor leisure activities have been associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms, increased happiness and life satisfaction (Menec, 2003), and improved health and social functioning (Drakou et al., 2008). Furthermore, involvement in physical activities may promote an active lifestyle and associated health benefits (Davison & Lawson, 2006).

The university is a critical context in which people consolidate a life-style that is likely to support their future health (Molina-García, Castillo, & Pablos, 2009). The majority of the studies carried out on university students have observed that an active lifestyle is an important factor for mental health (e.g., Kai & Yamazaki, 2009).

A large number of people currently attend colleges and universities, and their leisure time physical activity participation cannot continue to be ignored by researchers. Thus, research on this facet of physical recreation activity is important for leisure and recreation professionals to better understand participants' leisure behaviour. If the interests of society are to be served, colleges and universities must recognise that all students should be informed of the relationship between physical activity participation and quality of life, regardless of sex, age, marital or parental status. Little and Guse (1988) emphasise that the development and operation of specialized facilities and services focusing on the on-campus recreational needs of students has become an accepted part of the administrative structure in higher education in America and worldwide. Moreover, knowledge gained from such behavioral research will eventually help practitioners as well as researchers. It is vital for leisure practitioners to know what motivates participants to engage in their services, programmes and activities, as well as to fulfill their needs and desires. For leisure researchers, the development of a behavioral model or theory can help to

organize knowledge and experience and stimulate and guide future research. It can also aid in the development of better explanations and theories.

## **Leisure and Recreation Frameworks for Investigating Leisure Time Physical Activity**

Leisure has been defined using multiple definitions as can be seen in the literature. Most inquiries into the history of thinking about leisure begin with classical Greek philosophy, specifically Aristotle (Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1991). To sum up, leisure has been viewed historically in three ways: as experience, activity or time. Whereas, recreation is defined as voluntary, non-work activity that is organized for the attainment of personal and social benefits including restoration and social cohesion (Kelly & Godbey, 1992).

Over the past two decades, leisure research has generated a body of literature pertinent to understanding and increasing active living, including studies on time use, motivation for initiating and maintaining activity and influence of user fees and urban park use (Floyd, & Payne, 2005). The evolution and importance of theory in leisure research have been recognized as essential to broaden understanding of leisure (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2005).

Researchers studying leisure, parks and recreation have an important role to play in addressing active living and health issues (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2005). It has become acceptable for leisure and recreation professionals to focus on the health outcomes and benefits of active living.

Perspectives presented in the leisure and recreation literature have significant ties to the literature related to health behavior. Several of the theories and frameworks presented in the leisure journals are similar to those in health behavior studies. However, one of the theories housed specifically in leisure studies is the Leisure Constraint Theory. One model of this theory was developed in 1987 by Crawford and Godbey, which centered on the construction of three models of leisure barriers: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991) and is similarly structured to the Social Ecological Model. However, the Leisure Constraint Theory introduces the perspective of inhibiting participation or engagement. With its initial focus on the „problematic“ aspects of initiating leisure participation, leisure constraints research seeks to understand factors that impede leisure participation and otherwise compromise the realization of leisure-related goals (Hinch & Jackson, 2000). According to Jackson, 2000:

No constraint is experienced with equal intensity by everyone, although time and cost related

constraints rank among the most widely and intensely experienced inhibitors of the achievement of leisure goals and a balanced lifestyle.

*The experience of constraints varies among individuals and groups: no sub-group of the Population is entirely free from constraints and each group is characterized not only by varying intensities of the experience of each type of constraint, but also by a unique combination of constraints. Thus relatively less constrained by time, young people's leisure is typically affected by lack of partners, opportunities and costs. The transition to middle adulthood sees a decline in these types of constraints but a marked increase in time commitments.*

Although constraints inhibit leisure participation, they do not necessarily prevent it (Beggs, Elkins, & Powers, 2005). Instead, some people may negotiate through constraints and thus succeed in initiating or continuing leisure participation, albeit in a way that may differ from how they would participate if constraints were absent (Jackson & Rucks, 1995). In many instances, individuals are able to overcome or negotiate constraints in order to participate in leisure activities (Elkins, Beggs, & Choutka, 2007). Beggs et al. (2005) found that college students used different methods of negotiation in order to participate in leisure activities and that the most common negotiation methods they used were time management strategies. Understanding the distribution of constraints in society, how they affect people's lives and leisure and how people adapt to these constraints is a crucial task for leisure researchers (E. L. Jackson, 2000).

### **College Students` Engagement in Leisure Time Physical Activity**

Evidence indicates that levels of leisure time physical activity decline from high school to college and activity patterns in college populations are generally insufficient to improve health and fitness (Kilpatrick, Hebert, & Bartholomew, 2005). The most rapid decline in leisure time physical activity occurs in late adolescence and early adulthood .

Changes in leisure behavior are most likely to occur during periods of life transition, when individuals' roles, relationships and ecological contexts are altered (Raymore, Barber, & Eccles, 2001). Transition from high school to a college or university is a major life stressor for many students and is associated with an abundance of increased health risk factors including decreases in physical activity (Baranowski et al., 1997).

Healthy Campus 2010 identifies physical inactivity as 1 of the 6 priority health risk behaviors for college students (American College Health Association, 2004). The freedom to exert behavioral autonomy inherent in the college context and the self-determined nature of leisure combine to suggest that college students are faced with a great deal of choice in how they spend their free time

(Sylvia- Bobiak & Caldwell, 2006). Although college students have specific time constraints related to their academic schedules, they also have considerable discretionary time. The choices made about how to spend this time influence one's levels of leisure time physical activity, and various factors influence these choices (Buckworth & Nigg, 2004). Sparling and Snow (2002) found that 84.7% of their research participants ( $n = 367$ ) who were physically active as college students were engaging in physical activity at similar or greater levels six years after graduation (Sparling & Snow, 2002). Evidence indicates that physical activity patterns established in childhood, adolescence and young adulthood can determine quality of life in one's later years (Buckworth, 2001). An emphasis on leisure may be crucial in helping people learn to enjoy physical movement from the time they are children into adulthood (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2005).

College students are exposed to many opportunities of socialization and behavior-governing norms, thus post-secondary institutions provide a unique environment in which physical activity promotion efforts can be delivered to a large number of young adults in an effective way (Seo, Nehl, Agle, & Ma, 2007).

In addition to research suggesting a decline in leisure time physical activity during the transition to college, a greater proportion of Americans are making this transition, thus furthering the need to better understand and improve physical activity behaviors of college students.

During the past three decades, the number of individuals with four or more years of higher education has nearly doubled. According to the United States Census Bureau, enrollment in two- and four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. reached 20.5 million in 2006, up 3 million since 2000. These increases in the college population provide the opportunity to positively impact leisure time physical activity patterns of this demographic.

## **Campus Recreation**

One significant area of recreation is the growing field of student campus recreation (Daprano, Pastore, & Costa, 2008). Comprehensive campus recreation programs include formal and informal recreational opportunities such as intramural sports, fitness programs, sport clubs, outdoor recreation, aquatics programs and aerobic dance classes (Zhang, DeMichele, & Connaughton, 2004). Campus recreation centers exist for reasons that align with overall missions of universities; namely education, enhancing the quality of student life and preparing people for the future. Over the past two and a half decades, colleges and universities have made major financial investments in recreation facilities that enrich campus life and enhance the well-being of their students.

One of the reasons for campus recreation programs is the positive impact that the use of such programs, services and facilities has on the quality of life of its users, most often students (Lewis, Barcelona, & Jones, 2001). Campus recreation has important responsibilities in terms of promoting the overall well-being of students, helping to reduce negative or destructive forms of play, extending and enriching academic learning and contributing to other college and university goals (McLean, Hurd, & Rogers, 2005). The integration of recreation services with the overall student experience has led to an increase in importance of recreation programming on college campuses (Turman & Hendel, 2004).

The physical and mental health benefits of engaging in the types of physical activity offered by campus recreation facilities are well known and strongly supported by over a half century of research. Research in the past few decades has shown that participation in campus recreational programs helps with students' wellness (Ellis, Compton, Tyson, & Bohlig, 2002), student attrition (Chrurchill & Iwai, 1981), retention and recruitment (Belch, Gebel, & Maas, 2001), academic performance (Belch, Gebel, & Maas, 2001) and students' overall satisfaction with their college experience (Dalgarn, 2001). Research supports recreational sport facilities and programs as recruiting enhancements, which increase overall satisfaction with the collegiate experience and make a positive contribution to institutions' retention efforts. A number of recent studies have focused on usage of campus recreation facilities as it relates to student learning, development and academic success (Lindsey & Sessoms, 2006). Given the importance of physical activity for health, the irregular pattern of college students' activity and the potential for colleges to have an effect on physical activity, including free or low-cost fitness facilities, recreation programs and exercise classes, scientific study of this behavior is warranted (Suminski & Petosa, 2002).

Ellis et al. (2002) reported findings on the frequency of participation in campus recreation services in relation to health and quality of life variables. They found significantly positive effects of frequency of participation on four variables; satisfaction with life as a whole, satisfaction with experience at the university at which they were studying, extent to which emotional health interfered with social functioning and how often the individuals felt like they had "a lot of energy" (Tyson, & Bohlig, 2002). Another study of college freshman found that students who used the student recreation center not only persisted at a greater rate than those who did not, but also earned higher grade point averages and more credit hours at the end of their freshman year than non-users (Belch, Gebel, & Maas, 2001).

## **Conclusion**

Although there were a large number of students currently attending colleges and universities, their leisure physical activity participation cannot continue to be virtually ignored by researchers. Research into this facet of physical recreation activity is important for leisure and recreation professionals in order to better understand participants' leisure behaviour. If the interests of society are to be served, colleges and universities must help students recognize the implications of physical activity participation and its relationship to the quality of their lives regardless of their sex, age, marital, or parental status (Attarian, 1990). Little and Guse (1988) suggest that, by emphasizing the on-campus recreational needs of students, the development and operation of specialized facilities and services has become an accepted part of the administrative structure in higher education in America and around the world.

Moreover, knowledge gained from this kind of behavioral research will eventually assist practitioners in their work. It is vital that leisure practitioners know what motivates participants to engage in their services, programmes, and activities. This information is also vital for identifying participants' needs and wants. For leisure researchers, the development of a behavioral model or theory can help to organize knowledge and experience, as well as stimulate and guide future research. It also can help in the development of better future explanations and theories (Watson, 1996).

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