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2004

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### Repository Citation

Stier, William F.; Schneider, Robert C.; Kampf, Stephen; Wilding, Gregory E.; and Haines, Scott G., "Identification of Problems in Campus Recreation Programs in North America" (2004). *Kinesiology, Sport Studies and Physical Education Faculty Publications*. 43. [https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/pes\\_facpub/43](https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/pes_facpub/43)

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## **Identification of Problems in Campus Recreation Programs in North America**

By William F. Stier, Jr., Ed.D., Robert C. Schneider, Ed.D., Steve Kampf, CRSS, Gregory E. Wilding, Ph.D., and Scott Haines, CRSS, M.S.

In campus recreation programs, major problem areas within (a) technology, (b) personnel, and (c) perception and value were identified. The subjects were campus recreation directors throughout North America. The surveyed directors expressed the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with literature-based, potential problem areas within campus recreation programs. Areas primarily agreed upon as being major problem areas within campus recreation were: the availability of quality officials (61%), perception of program by institution (49%), and value of program as perceived by higher administration (47%). Generally, in order to improve programs, directors should place an emphasis on attaining and training quality officials and implement a public relations campaign that positively portrays their program.

The campus recreation director is constantly faced with problems throughout the process of managing and directing his/her programs. If major problems that are most common in campus recreation programs throughout the country can be identified – and discussed with the intent of discovering solutions – the campus recreation director is better equipped to manage and direct the campus recreation programs. Based on responses from surveyed campus recreation directors, this study identified and discussed major problems within campus recreation programs. The directors provided the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following areas as being major problems:

- Technology
- Personnel
- Perception and value

For brevity purposes, throughout this article, the term campus recreation directors will frequently be referred to as directors.

### **Related Literature**

#### Technology

There is an abundance of literature related to technology and how it relates to recreational sports (Handel & Forrester, 1997; Kendell, 1997; Ross & Wolter 1997; Sherman, 1998; Ross & Forrester, 2001; Young & Ross, 2000). In the sports, fitness and recreation industry, colleges have become the leaders in website development (Sherman). Amidst this technology boom, Young and Ross caution against qualifying technology as a panacea for a quality recreational sports program, but emphasize the importance of technology to improve quality and speed of daily operations, as well as its ability to provide valuable information to assist in administrative decision-making. Ross and Forrester (2001) found that collegiate recreational sports departments rely on WebPages for intramural sports, marketing, promotions, disseminating information, increasing exposure, publicity, and improvement of customer service in their programs. Levin (2000) found that understanding key trends, such as technology, increased the effectiveness of leaders in organizations.

#### Personnel

Regarding personnel-related issues, literature was examined that addressed training, employee-selection, retention or turnover, and officials' effect on sportsmanship in intramural programs. Meir and Bohte (2003) suggested that personnel require less training in stable organizations. In a study that examined employee-selection policies, Boucher, Morese, and Chant (2001) claim there is no sure-fire approach

to hiring top employees and employee turnover is inevitable. Game officials in campus recreation departments are personnel who assist in monitoring sportsmanship through four distinct systems that Vincent and Kearney (2001) identified in intramural programs: penalties, sportsmanship points, and two different methods of evaluating sportsmanship from a team perspective.

### Perception and Value

The value and benefits of campus recreation sports are numerous and widespread. It is often argued that one of the reasons for a campus recreation program at a college or university 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, J.B., Barcelona, R., & Jones, T., 2001). Downs (2003) found that participation in recreational sports programs and activities correlated with overall college satisfaction and success. Heavy users of campus recreational sports programs and activities were found to be happier than light users and nonusers (Downs). In the same study, Downs identified several benefits to those who participated in recreational sports and found a key determinant of college satisfaction and success to be participation in recreational sports. Farrell and Thompson (1999) reported that participation in intramural activities, as opposed to interscholastic activities, offers a wider array of benefits to many more students; and, in a study that conducted phone surveys of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), it was found that respondents were in agreement with the notion that campus intramural, club and recreational sports programs provide meaningful opportunities for student development and leadership (Mowery, 2000).

## Methods

### Population

The subject pool was 682 in number and included all campus recreation directors of institutions of higher education in North America as

identified by the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association office located in Corvallis, Oregon. Of the 682 surveys mailed out, 269 were returned for a return rate of 39 percent.

The below subject demographics were based on the 269 returned, usable surveys.

The percentage of subjects represented six regions:

- Region 1 .....23%
- Region 2 .....23%
- Region 3 .....14%
- Region 4 .....16%
- Region 5 .....7%
- Region 6 .....16%

Public institutions accounted for 70 percent of the subjects and private institutions accounted for 30 percent of the subjects. The educational institutions were categorized as urban (44%), suburban (28%), and rural (28%). The average size of the enrollment at the educational institutions was 11,563, ranging from a low of 900 students to a high of 46,000 students. The directors indicated that 62 percent of them reported to student affairs and 24 percent reported to athletics, while 6 percent reported to athletics and only 1 percent reported to business.

Further demographic information indicated that on average, campus recreation directors have been employed at their present educational institution for 11 years, ranging from a low of one year, to a high of 39 years. Prior to assuming the title of Campus Recreation Director, the respondents worked on average eight years within campus recreation with full-time status. It was indicated that 58 percent of the directors have responsibilities assigned outside of campus recreation, while 42 percent work exclusively within campus recreation.

Support personnel demographics were gathered in the areas of full-time professional staff, graduate assistants, and the full-time equivalent of secretarial staff. The number of full-time professional staff available for campus recreation directors varied between 0 and 100 and on average was five. While not applicable for those campus recreation directors without professional full-time staff, when asked whether any professional staff of campus recreation directors were

assigned duties outside of campus recreation, 36 percent responded affirmatively and 50 percent indicated that their professional staff responsibilities were exclusive to campus recreation.

The number of graduate assistants working for campus recreation ranged from 0 to 30 with two being the average. The average number of secretarial staff members (or the full-time equivalent) reported as working in campus recreation was 1.5, with 0 being reported as the low and 20 the high. While ranging from 0 to 60, on average, there were five students per campus recreation program who were part of the campus recreation secretarial staff work force.

### Survey

Based on a thorough review of the literature most directly related to problem areas in campus recreation programs throughout North America, an initial draft of a Likert-scale survey instrument was developed. Second, additional factors based on the researchers' experiences in dealing with problems associated with campus recreation experiences were generated. Next, a draft of the survey composed of the survey factors was formed. To ensure content validity for the purpose of feedback, the draft was forwarded to a panel of five experts from five different universities. The experts were campus recreation directors with at least 10 years of directing experience. Based on feedback from the panel of experts, the survey took on its final form as some survey items were added or deleted, whereas others were modified. The Likert-scale consisted of five response choices per statement: 5 – strongly agree, 4 – agree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 2 disagree, and 1 – strongly disagree.

### Results

#### Technology

The majority of campus recreation directors **disagreed** that each of the five technology areas were major problems (See Table 1). The

	Agreed	No Opinion	Disagreed
1. Computer availability and usage	18%	9%	73%
2. Web site availability	16%	9%	75%
3. Web site creation and updating	32%	9%	59%
4. Lack of computer training	25%	14%	61%
5. Availability of technology for campus recreation	26%	11%	63%

level at which the directors either strongly disagreed or disagreed were as follows:

- Website availability ..... 75%
- Computer availability and usage ..... 73%
- Availability of technology for campus recreation ..... 63%
- Lack of computer training ..... 61%
- Website creation and updating ..... 59%

The area of technology that had the highest level of directors strongly agreeing or agreeing (32%) that it was a major problem was that of website creation and updating. Website creation and planning had a high frequency of directors strongly agreeing (11%) that it was a major problem.

Although to a lesser extent, many directors did, however, strongly agree or agree that the remaining four areas of technology were major problems. These four technology areas, along with the correlative rate of directors strongly agreeing or agreeing, were as follows:

- Availability of technology for campus recreation..... 26%
- Lack of computer training ..... 25%
- Computer availability and usage..... 18%
- Website availability ..... 16%

Personnel

Table 2 displays the level at which directors agreed or disagreed that selected areas of personnel were major problems in their campus recreation programs. The results were obtained regarding the extent

	Agreed	No Opinion	Disagreed
1. Availability of qualified staffing – Professional	39%	11%	50%
2. Availability of support staff – such as secretarial	41%	9%	50%
3. Availability of quality student employees	37%	6%	57%
4. Availability of quality officials	61%	10%	29%
5. Retention of student employees	35%	10%	55%
6. Student employee evaluation	23%	19%	58%
7. Evaluation of staff/personnel	18%	19%	63%

to which the directors agreed or disagreed that the following seven areas of personnel were major problems:

1. Availability of qualified professional staffing
2. Availability of support staff (such as secretarial)
3. Availability of quality student employees
4. Availability of quality officials
5. Retention of student employees
6. Student employee evaluation
7. Evaluation of staff/personnel

The majority of campus recreation directors either disagreed or strongly disagreed that six of the seven areas of personnel on the survey – with availability of quality officials being the lone exception – were major problem areas.

Evaluation of staff/personnel was disagreed or strongly disagreed upon at the most frequent rate by the directors (63%) as being a major problem area.

The next highest disagreed or strongly disagreed upon personnel areas as being major problems were:

- Student employee evaluation ..... 58%
- Availability of quality student employees..... 57%
- Retention of student employees..... 55%

Of the personnel areas, the availability of quality officials was either agreed or strongly agreed upon by the highest rate of directors (61%) as being a major problem area.



Table 3: Perception and Value as major problems: Level of agreement and disagreement

	Agreed	No Opinion	Disagreed
1. Institutions perception	49%	11%	42%
2. Student Government perception	25%	19%	56%
3. Difficulty involved in accurately determining the value of Campus Recreation to the institution's higher administration	47%	13%	40%
4. Difficulty involved in accurately determining the value of Campus Recreation to the students and other clients	28%	11%	61%
5. Support from institution/administration	36%	11%	53%
6. Administrative support and understanding toward Campus Recreation	39%	8%	53%

The next most frequently agreed or strongly agreed upon problem areas were:

- Availability of support staff ..... 41%
- Availability of quality staffing..... 39%
- Availability of quality student employees..... 37%
- Retention of student employees..... 35%

#### Perception and Value

**Table 3** displays the level at which directors agreed or disagreed that selected areas of perception and value of the program were major problems in their campus recreation programs. In four of the six areas examined, the majority of directors either disagreed or strongly disagreed that there was a major problem in the way that their program was perceived and valued by certain entities or bodies. Difficulty involved in accurately determining the value of campus recreation to students and other clients was either agreed or disagreed upon by the highest percentage of directors (61%) as being a major problem.

Also disagreed or strongly disagreed upon as being a major problem by the majority of the directors were:

- Student government perception ..... 56%
- Administrative support and understanding toward campus recreation ..... 53%
- Support from institution/administration ..... 36%

The two perceptions and value areas that were most highly agreed or strongly agreed upon as being major problems were:

- Institutions' perceptions ..... 49%
- Difficulty involved in accurately determining the value of campus recreation to the institution's higher administration ..... 47%

## Discussion

### Technology

Results show that the most highly agreed upon area of *technology* believed to be a problem was website creation and planning. It would seem that technology itself is not the problem, but having the resources and knowledge necessary to effectively implement technology.

Three previous studies shed some light on what some of these problems related to technology may be. In a study conducted by Young and Ross (2000), the concern of depersonalization of programs with the advancement of technology was expressed. Options that allow for personalization should be made. Phone numbers should be provided on websites and the opportunity for consumers to meet with program

staff members should be made. The best of both worlds should be provided for the consumer:

- The opportunity to surf campus recreation websites to acquire information at one's own pace.
- The opportunity to talk with campus recreation staff, over the phone or in person, if the consumer so desires.

In a second study, Sherman (1998) addressed what essentially is a resource problem when stating: "There is no limit to how much time could be spent developing a website" (p. 15). Given the "upside," updated websites that market and contain program information should be maintained. Directors should not be "penny wise and dollar foolish."

Such website-related functions as program marketing, online registration, and game results and statistics updates – if done well – attract increased numbers of participants. Investing in a webmaster is a financially viable choice. One thing is certain: With the inevitability of technological advances, directors must continually stay ahead of the technology curve in order to most effectively operate their programs.

In a third study, Ross & Forrester (2001) cited lack of staff expertise as a number one reason why recreational sports departments did not maintain WebPages for their recreational sports program. Directors must be proactive in seeking out website workshops for the purpose of creating expert staff webmasters. Most, if not all, institutions of higher education offer such workshops throughout the year.

### Personnel

This study indicated that the availability of quality officials is a problem area. Without quality officials, competitive play may become overly aggressive, creating for a dangerous situation for participants, and possibly rendering the program negligent. Reinforcement of the importance of quality officials in an intramural program is the notion

that Vincent and Kearney, (2001) recognize that an official's ability to resolve conflict is a critical asset and skill for any intramural official.

### Perception and Value

The results of this study show that an institutions' perceptions and the difficulty involved in accurately determining the value of campus recreation to the institution's higher administration as being problems. These findings are consistent with the assertion that it is difficult to measure what is often claimed anecdotally: Campus recreation programs enhance student quality of life (Lewis et al., 2001).

Since the literature indicates that users of campus recreation programs are valuable and gain benefits (Downs, P.E., 2003; Farrell & Thompson, 1999; Lewis et al.; Mowery, 2000), it becomes the responsibility of directors to ensure that upper administrators perceive campus recreation programs as valuable and beneficial to users. As a means of informing upper administrators of the value of campus recreation, directors should highlight the values and user benefits in marketing campaigns and further emphasize them through informal conversations.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Technology

It might be helpful for campus recreation programs if efforts are made by upper administration, as well as the directors themselves, to increase website creation and planning. Effective campus recreation websites create increased exposure to the program, which should ultimately result in an increased number of students and overall growth of these programs. Even without strong support from the educational institution, the directors might prove themselves resourceful by locating and assigning interested student employees willing to launch and monitor program websites. Inquiries within the educational institution might even reveal a course on campus that requires students to create and oversee a website as part of a course requirement.

### Personnel

Availability of quality officials is the personnel area that needs the most improvement. Without quality officials, unsportsmanlike conduct may increase. Contests may result in increased inappropriate verbal and physical actions. Inappropriate verbal actions might take place that include trash-talking and other derogatory language directed at participants; whereas inappropriate physical actions might include overly aggressive play that leads to fighting. Unsportsmanlike behavior, in general, will increase the probability of litigation against programs.

The lack of availability of quality officials may be a result of two factors: improper identification of capable individuals for the position, and ineffective training of officials upon identification. Upon identifying interested candidates (usually students), in order to restrict the candidate pool to capable officials, directors must first inform the candidates with the realities of the position and especially the negativity associated with the position. If the potential official can accept controversy, conflict, and the fact that disagreement from players and fans alike will take place on nearly every call, they can then be placed in a training program or class to become an official. It is essential that officials receive training conducted by veteran officials with adequate game experience. As part of the training, the potential officials should not only be required to pass a comprehensive, sport-specific rules test, but also a contest-related exam in which officiating actually takes place.

To ensure that contests are officiated in a quality manner, the training of officials is a necessary step but not a final one. Contests should not be occupied wholly by beginning officials, but should consist of a combination of beginning, intermediate, and advanced level officials. The director must also be able to anticipate contests that will be the most difficult to control and accordingly assign the most advanced crew of officials.

## Perception and Value

Improvements need to take place in the perception and value areas of institutions' perceptions, as well as difficulty involved in accurately determining the value of campus recreation to the institution's higher administration. In order to improve in each of these areas affecting the image of the program, directors should be proactive in ensuring quality within the program. Although poor programs can initially be effectively marketed, in general, long-term positive perceptions by high-level administration and the institution will be reached only by actually establishing and maintaining a quality program that will naturally elicit overall positive perceptions. Evidence revealed in this study seems to support the statement by Mowery (2000) that programs would likely be well served by assessing what their own senior administrators actually know regarding the responsibilities of campus recreation professionals. Sharing relevant information and articles from professional conferences and journals with supervisors might be an excellent way to inform and educate (Mowery).

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