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ENHANCING THE EXPERIENCE:
AN ANALYSIS OF COLLEGIATE RECREATION'S IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING

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Abstract

Collegiate recreation has the opportunity to impact student growth beyond physical activity. Serving as one of the university's largest employers, collegiate recreation provides students with opportunities to achieve desired university learning outcomes. The purpose of this exploratory case study was to examine what on-the-job activities and experiences impact the five learning domains: career development, civic and community engagement, leadership, ethics and values, and responsible independence. BGSU undergraduate students who have been employed with BGSU Recreation and Wellness for a minimum of one semester were recruited to participate in this study. Respondents who agreed to participate in the study completed a self-administered questionnaire by rating the frequency of their experiences in 13 on-the-job activities and experiences and questions about the five learning domains. The result of analysis indicated there are statistically significant relationships between many on-the-job experiences and the five learning domains. Collaboration, problem solving, task repetition and informal interactions with supervisors were found to be on-the-job activities relating strongest to the five learning domains.

Introduction

In an era of increasing demands for accountability on college campuses, there are several reasons to look further into ways our campuses are creating a holistic environment for student growth and development. Both academic and student affairs must concentrate on creating and demonstrating concrete learning gains made by students during their time at an institution. This exploratory case study takes a look at many of the specific domains that make up these learning outcomes. Those domains are: career development; civic and community engagement; intra- and inter-personal competence; ethics and values; healthy living; intercultural competence/ maturity; leadership; responsible independence. This study was designed to more specifically look at the Department of Recreation and Wellness and its role within the University of providing students the opportunity to reach the University's learning outcomes. This case study analyzes what activities and experiences relate strongest to achieving these learning domains.

The National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) defines their critical research priorities into eight areas including: student retention, health and wellness, student recruitment, student learning outcomes, risk management, funding, student staff, and student affairs partnership and collaboration. This study takes a look at two of these priorities, student learning outcomes and student staff. The NIRSA Board of Directors defines the critical area of student learning outcomes by assessing the effectiveness of participation, volunteering and employment on achievement of student learning outcomes; and defines the student staff critical area by analyzing the relationship of student employment and factors such as engagement, retention, learning outcomes, job skills, and competencies (NIRSA, 2011). A common misconception revolving around campus recreation departments is that they solely exist to provide students a place to participate in physical activity. While campus recreation

professionals take pride themselves in leading the way to a healthy and active campus community, they also contribute to the academic mission of a university through the areas listed above, retention, recruitment, learning outcomes, staff development, collaboration, and leadership development. It has become increasingly important for auxiliary areas such as campus recreation to prove their contribution to a university's overall mission as budgets continue to shrink and accountability of services rise.

Bowling Green State University's Department of Recreation employs 200 students in attendant, associate, manager and supervisor positions at the Student Recreation Center (SRC), Perry Field House (PFH) and Forrest Creason Golf Course (FCGC) each semester. The SRC specifically employs students in the areas of fitness, aquatics, customer service, intramurals, facilities, outdoor program, and wellness. These students take on the opportunity to work many front line and administrative duties in areas of risk management, problem solving, computer competency, job specific knowledge, certifications, and additional opportunities to build the skills contributing to BGSU's learning outcomes.

Answering the question, what on-the-job experiences relate strongest to learning domains, will undoubtedly improve the Department of Recreation and Wellness's approach to develop staff, measure the impact of student positions, and create changes to further improve student learning. Looking at the relationship between on-the-job activities and higher education learning domains will also help provide research for the development of NIRSA's critical areas and provide evidence to our impact on Bowling Green State University's mission of promoting student learning, personal growth, and developing communities that value all members.

Literature Review

As college campuses continue to enhance facilities, programming and overall opportunities for students, the opportunities for overall growth and development must improve. Student development through college is hardly one-dimensional; the collegiate experience is multifaceted, one that encompasses a myriad of interconnected relationships and interactions (Lewis & Contreras, 2009). The typical workload for a full time undergraduate student is 12-18 credit hours, therefore, much of a students' learning takes place outside of academic classes through, co-curricular experiences. These experiences come in many forms including: part time employment, campus clubs and organizations, fraternity and sororities, athletics, recreation, residence halls, and many more opportunities for students to get involved. Much of previous research takes a look at student development in relation academic and cognitive measures. This study is meant to provide evidence to the other developmental outcomes during college such as (1) career development, (2) civic and community engagement, (3) leadership, (4) ethics and values, and (5) responsible independence. These outcomes are emphasis areas for many academic institutions including Bowling Green State University who has all of these items listed in the Division of Student Affairs student learning outcomes. While schools list these as emphasis areas, there are few co-curricular experiences that have evidence to show their role in helping students reach these desired outcomes. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the role Bowling Green State University's Department of Recreation and Wellness plays in undergraduate student employee's success in the five developmental outcomes listed above.

In order to study the role of learning objectives, we must first know how they became a best practice within higher education. "The development of the learning objective concept is described as a linear process, starting with the objectives movement and continuing through the

mastery learning theories before ending up with the current, outcome-based education (OBE) movement” (Havnes & Proitz, 2016). Those favoring OBE claim that it is applicable to all forms of learning, accessible to far more individuals, efficient and cost-effective. It is also flexible since learning objectives are specified as outcomes independent of traditional learning and assessment processes, thus allowing different modes, contexts and time scales of learning (Haynes & Proitz, 2016). Accrediting associations have raised expectations for institutions to collect evidence of student learning outcomes and use such information for institutional improvement (Liu, Bridgeman & Adler, 2012). For instance, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the primary organization for voluntary accreditation and quality assurance to the U.S. Congress and Department of Education, has focused on the role of accreditation in student achievement by establishing the CHEA Award for Outstanding Institutional Practice in Student Learning Outcomes (Liu, Bridgeman & Adler, 2012). While the government begins to tighten regulations on learning outcomes, Havnes and Proitz argue its effectiveness. “We argue that introducing learning outcomes predominantly for policy and management purposes may actually weaken the learning outcomes’ potential to direct teaching and learning and to improve the quality of both” (Havnes & Proitz, 2016). While in the classroom, learning outcomes can be perceived as just words on a syllabus, however, when followed through with objectives to help students reach desired outcomes, it takes a course from a singular subject to a well-rounded experience for the student. These opportunities for students to learn through observation, experience, and reflection, only begin in the classroom. Student affairs professionals must be more proactive in creating intentional learning opportunities into every aspect of the student employee’s experience, from application to graduation.

The foundation of this study is formed using two theoretical frameworks. A framework called “situated cognition” is a combination of authentic activity, context, and the surrounding culture, and at its most practical level, utilized a traditional apprentice model to spark learning (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). Wenger (2004) states that individuals who work in similar content areas share common challenges, voluntarily form a cohesive community through their interactions, and often come together to learn and grow from one another. Wenger’s theory focuses on learning that emerges organically from within a social or working group in writings on communities of practice (Wenger, 2004). “To learn meaningfully, student employees must be challenged by activities, tasks, and projects that are authentic to their position and involve a certain amount of reflection. However, student employee supervisors have a responsibility to purposefully select challenges that call upon the specific concepts, skills, and values that are recognized as meaningful or important to higher education institutions” (Lewis & Contreras, 2009). A step many supervisors have taken toward creating an intentional learning environment is to develop specific learning outcomes for student positions or entire student staffs as a whole. The learning domains used for the purpose of this study are widely discussed across NASPA, ACPA and emphasis areas among higher education for student achievement.

Career Development is used in the context of progression toward vocational goals as undergraduates prepare for satisfying, constructive, post college activity. “Guidelines have career development among the top areas students should be able to articulate career choices based on assessment of interests, values, and abilities in addition to performing tasks like resume creation or job searches.” (Lewis & Contreras, 2009)

Ethics and Values development is also widely discussed in the literature, from early cognitive-development theories (e.g. Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development, 1976) to current

researchers studying holistic student development (Braskamp et al., 2006). The Student Personnel Point of View (1949) speaks to students' almost inevitable need to revise long-held religious dictates and moral beliefs in light of "newly acquired scientific and technical knowledge" (p.26). ACPA's Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs (1996) states that administrators must help students "develop coherent values and ethical standards" (p.1).

Civic and Community Engagement has been well-supported over the years, referring to the participation in the university community and governance as well as becoming a responsible citizen (ACPA & NASPA, 2004; Astin, 1984; Braskamp et al., 2006; Student Learning Outcomes Project, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). *Leadership* is also another consistently referenced domain across literature referring to understanding the relational construct of being a leader, setting ethical examples for others and taking on responsibility to lead groups toward a shared vision (ACPA & NASPA, 2004; Astin, 1984; Braskamp et al., 2006; Student Learning Outcomes Project, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Finally, Responsible Independence is used to refer to developing practical competence in effective communication, time management, and self-sufficiency in the service of leading a satisfying and purposeful life (ACPA & NASPA, 2004; Astin, 1984; Braskamp et al., 2006; Student Learning Outcomes Project, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Learning outcomes are attainable only with proper preparation and implementation. "The role of collegiate recreation on campuses evolved from its foundation of intramural sports to a profession that believes in holistic wellness and lifelong activity" (McFadden, Wallace Carr, 2015). The purpose of collegiate recreation is wellness and learning within the university environment (Hardin, 2013). Many campus recreation departments also serve as the largest employer at their university. The opportunities for student employment within collegiate

recreation include areas such as facilities, intramurals, aquatics, fitness, and outdoor adventures. Professionals within the field have become strategic in training specific job skills needed to complete tasks. Skills such as selling memberships, providing first aid, and belaying a climber are all required for students to perform various jobs. Many professionals feel once their staff has mastered the membership sale, emergency action plan, or their first climber, then they are prepared. However, it is at that point in the students' job where the learning is just about to begin. There is still much room to grow for recreation programs to create leadership development, as "successful collegiate leadership programs are embedded in and aligned with the following four contextual layers: higher education's purpose, institutional mission, administrative support, and collaborative environment. Each of these layers contributes to or detracts from desired student learning outcomes" (Osteen & Coburn, 2012). The lack of clarity is evident in the collegiate recreation. The effort on student learning needs to go beyond just the technical skills, and develop intentional ways for students to understand and work towards their development in leadership, civic and community engagement, problem solving, and independence. "Although uses of conceptual models are limited, this does not mean that leadership perspectives are not being used" (Osteen & Coburn, 2012). "If collegiate recreation staff members believe in developing student leaders, then they must create intentional learning experiences for students to have an opportunity to grow within the collegiate recreation setting by linking their identity to developing their personal leadership capacity" (McFadden & Wallace Carr, 2015). In addition to leadership this study identifies the need to dig deeper into student skill development in the areas of career development, civic and community engagement, ethics and values, and responsible independence.

Summary

Together this study will identify what on-the-job experiences contribute strongest to the five learning domains detailed above. By identifying key strength areas for collegiate recreation professionals to incorporate intentional development plans will help universities enrich stronger students, assist students moving onto post-graduation with a more focused and confident vision for their future, and contribute to the overall field of collegiate recreation in their mission to find identity among college campuses as not just healthy living, but overall well-being.

The thirteen activities and experiences used to identify on the job learning in student employee roles are:

- Receive formal training in specific tasks
- Receive informal/unscheduled training in specific tasks
- Observe co-workers demonstration aspects of your job
- Collaborate or work as a team
- Receive feedback from peers
- Receive feedback from supervisor
- Interact informally with your supervisor
- Repeat the same tasks multiple times
- Problem Solve
- Experiment with new ideas
- Reflect about your job
- Make decisions based on your intuition or judgement as opposed to checking with supervisor
- Relate on-the-job tasks and experience with what you're learning in your classes

Understanding the frequency that these experiences take place within a students' role will help us to understand ways to further develop the student employees role to better mature in the five learning domains: career development, civic and community engagement, leadership, ethics and values, and responsible independence.

Research Question

What on-the-job experiences at a collegiate student recreation center relate most strongly with undergraduate learning outcomes?

Method

Participants & Measures

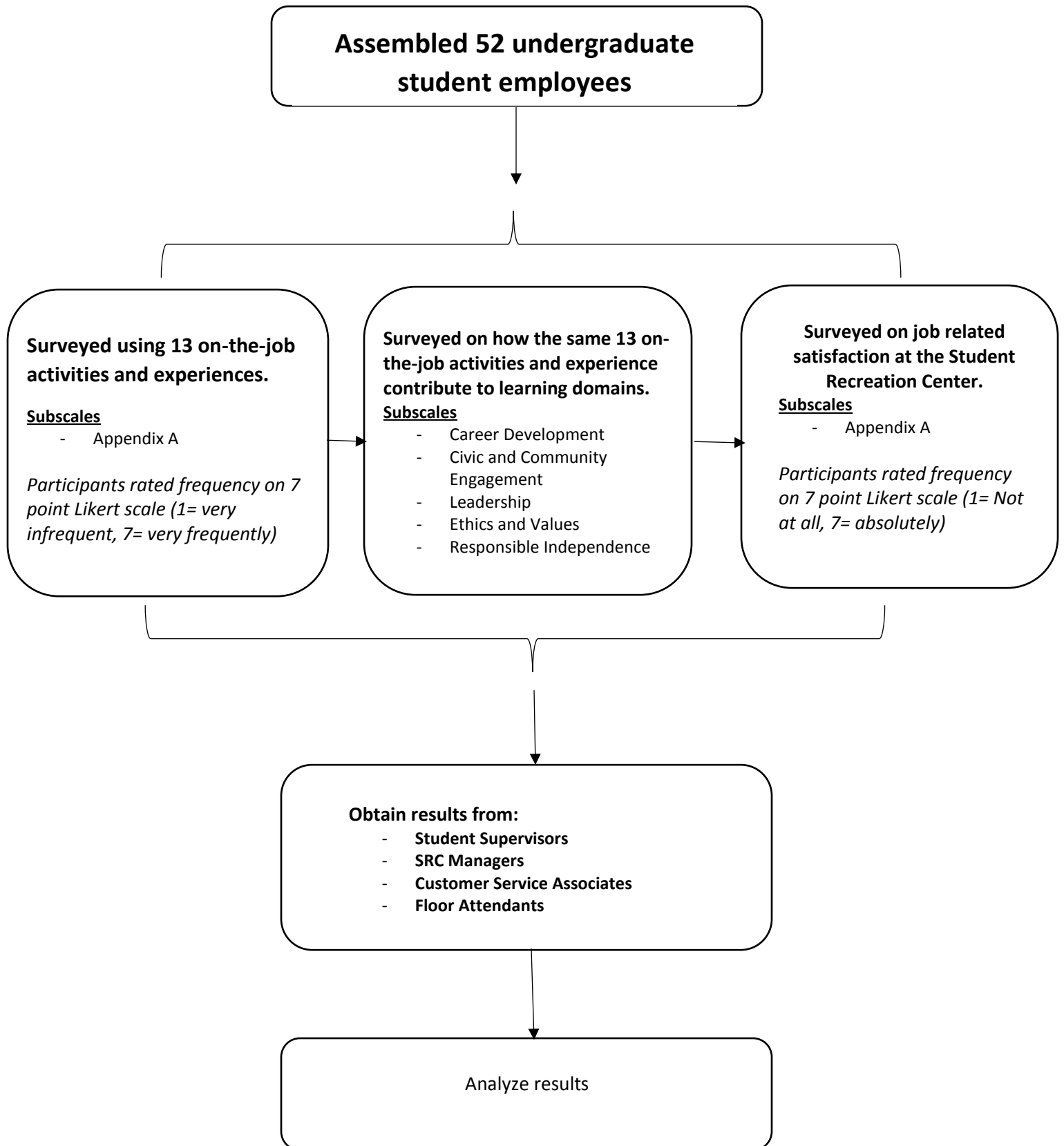
A workplace learning survey (Lewis & Contreras, 2009) was conducted through Qualtrics and sent to students employed at BGSU's Student Recreation Center. Eligibility to participate included being an active undergraduate student employed at the Student Recreation Center for a minimum of one academic semester (n=52). Student employees enrolled in this study serve as Student Supervisors, SRC Managers, Customer Service Associates, Floor Attendants and Group Exercise Instructors. The survey consisted of four sections. First, participants were asked how frequently they participate in 13 activities or experiences while on the job at the recreation center. These job-related activities were chosen to uncover overall learning, as opposed to job task performance. Participants were asked to describe the frequency they participate in these activities or experiences using a 7-point Likert scale (1= very infrequently, 7= very frequently). Next, students were asked to read a two-sentence description of five learning domain areas – Career Development; Civic and Community Engagement; Leadership; Ethics and Values; and Responsible Independence, and then rate how much they embodied or personified the description of each domain along a 7-point Likert scale (1= not at all, 7= completely). After, participants were asked to rate themselves on how the same 13 workplace experiences played a role in their development of each respective learning domain (1= very minimally, 7= extremely). For example, participants rated the extent to which their leadership development was a result of on the job problem solving.

Procedures

After receiving IRB approval, eligible participants were contacted by e-mail. Participation was voluntary and all surveys were submitted anonymously. Students were

informed that participation in the study would have no impact on their status as a student employee in the Department of Recreation and Wellness. While no direct benefit was received for participants, they had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences working at the Student Recreation Center. Once begun the survey took 10 to 15 minutes to complete from start to finish. Once students submitted the survey their participation in the study was complete.

Design and Analysis



Results

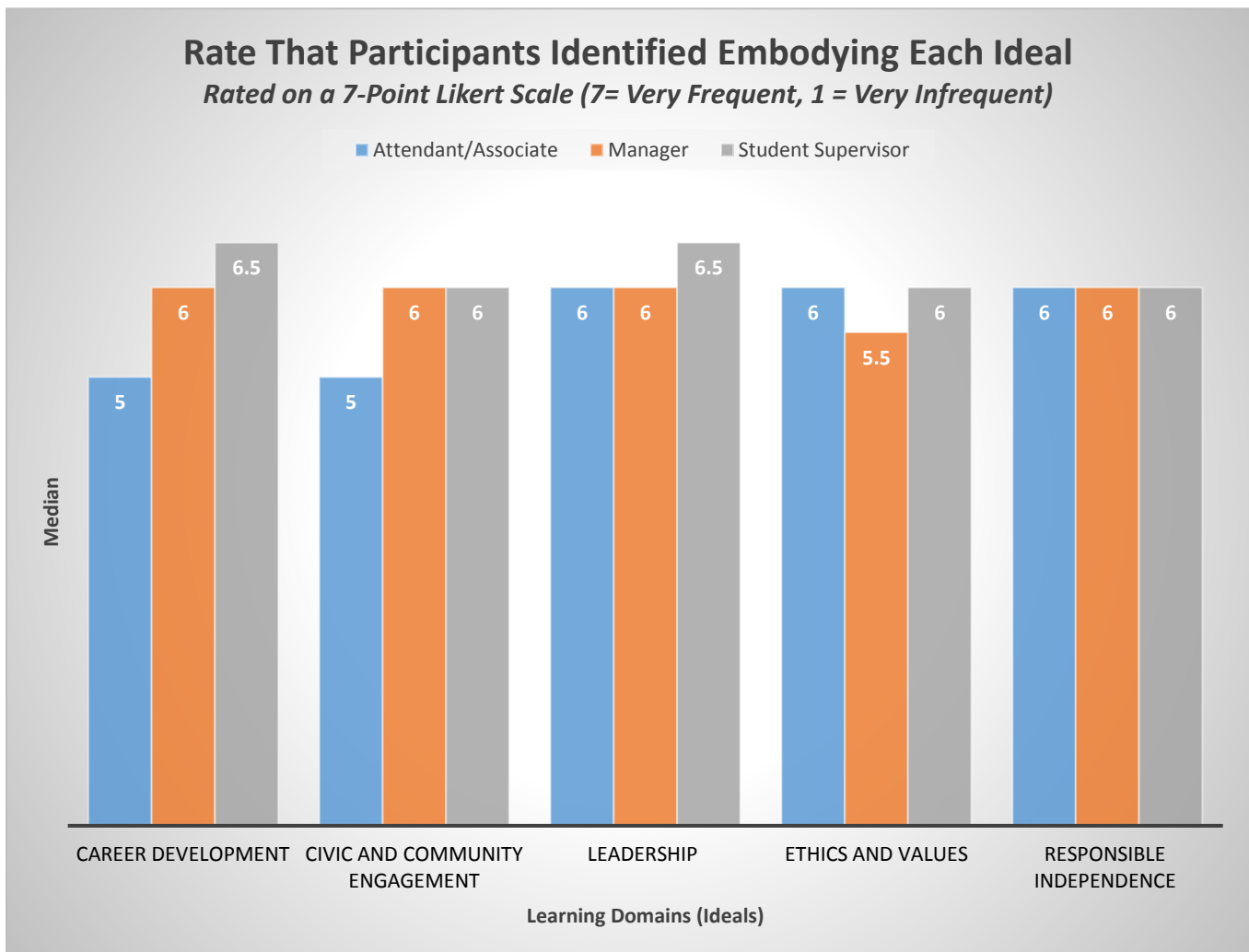
The participants in this study included 52 undergraduate students having been employed within BGSU's Department of Recreation and Wellness at the Student Recreation Center (SRC) for a minimum of one semester. 22 male and 30 female employees participated, 12 of which were freshman, 15 sophomores, 21 juniors, and 17 seniors. Among the participants were 4 Student Supervisors, 18 SRC Managers, and 29 Associate/Attendants.

Qualified participants were recruited for a period of one month to complete the survey (appendix A). 80 student employees at the Student Recreation Center qualified to take part in the survey with 52 following through and completing from start to finish.

The research question being analyzed is: what on-the-job experiences at a collegiate student recreation center relate most strongly with undergraduate learning outcomes? In order to answer this question data was collected from student employees' self-ratings of their perceived on-the-job experiences and self-identification of each learning domain. The independent variable being used are the student employees who rated their own embodiment of each identified learning domain, the dependent variables, using 13 on-the-job experiences.

In order to show the overall impact employment in collegiate recreation has on student learning, there are a few different data sets needing looked at. The first being the rate that participants identified themselves as embodying each ideal. These numbers are shown on the next page in figure 1.

Figure 1



After reading a description of each learning domain, students were asked to rate what extent they currently embodied the respective ideal. In all cases with the exception of ethics and values, Managers rated themselves as embodying each ideal at an equal or greater value than Attendants and Associates, and Student Supervisors in every case reported equal to or greater than ratings than both Managers and Attendant/Associates.

The next figure presents information needed to paint the picture on each positions' perceived frequency of all 13 on-the-job experiences and activities. Figure 2 on the next page details all three positions and the frequency of varied job tasks.

Figure 2

Frequency of On-The-Job Activities and Experiences

Rated on a 7-Point Likert Scale (7 - Very Frequent, 1 - Very Infrequent)

■ Attendant/Associate ■ Manager ■ Student Supervisor

Median

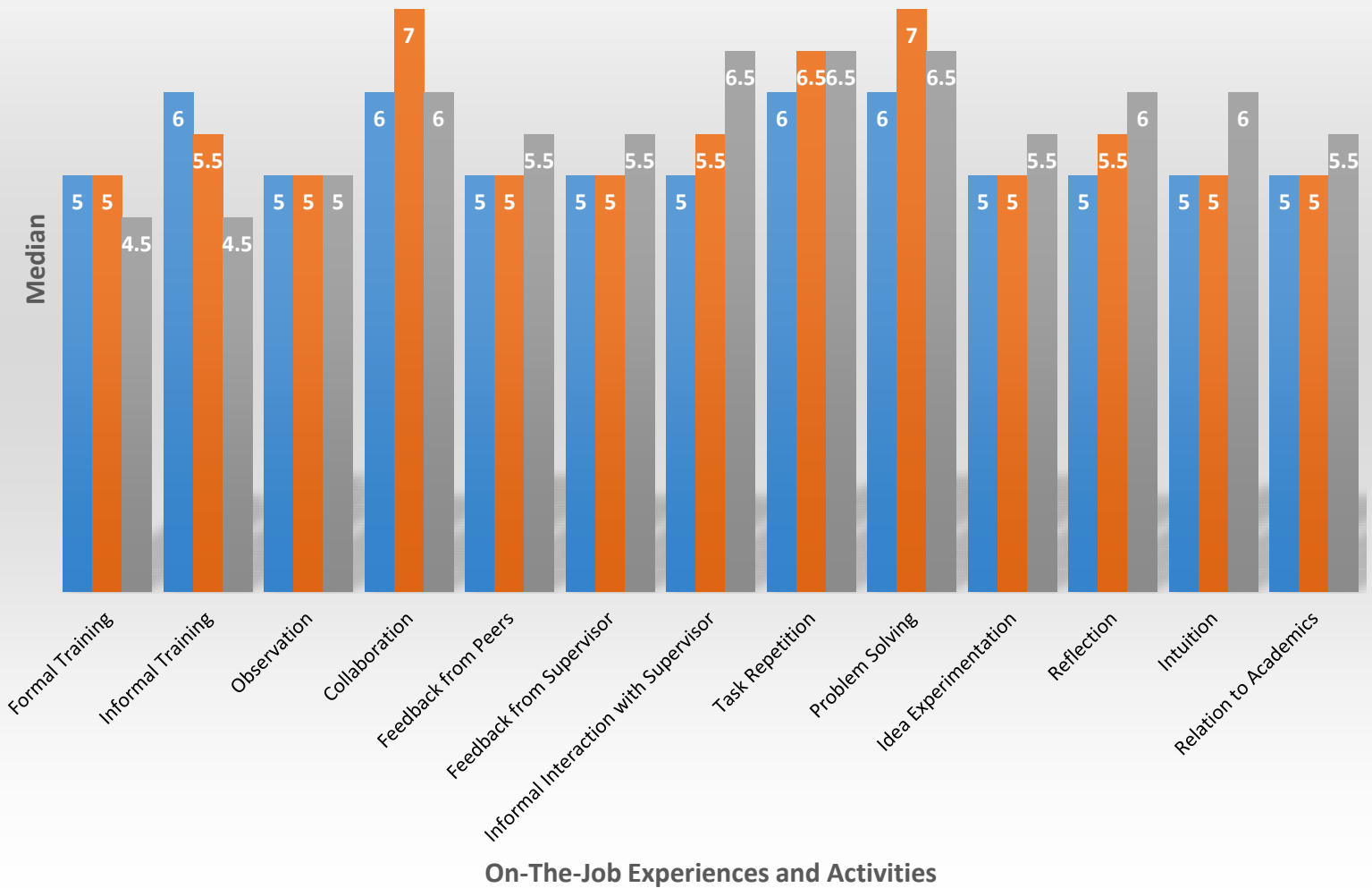


Figure 2 details the variations the three positions' day to day activities. Where attendants and associates reported basic levels of each experience on a consistent basis, managers and student supervisors varied more from task to task. Problem solving and collaboration were the two highest reported on-the-job activities across all three positions. Task repetition also was reported at high rates with the median number being six or above for all three position classifications.

In categories such as formal and informal training, collaboration, and problem solving student supervisors reported lower scores even though supervisor is a higher position requiring competency of manager level job tasks before assuming a supervisor role.

The main purpose of this study was to identify what on-the-job activities and experiences correlate strongest with the various learning domains. In order to do so we needed run correlations looking for a significance level. Table 1 on the following page details the relationship between the 5 learning domains discussed throughout this study, and the 13 on-the-job experiences.

	CAREER DEVELOPMENT	CIVIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	LEADERSHIP	ETHICS AND VALUES	RESPONSIBLE INDEPENDENCE
Receive formal training in specific tasks	-0.198	0.191	0.012	-0.043	-0.174
	0.355	0.370	0.956	0.843	0.415
Receive informal/unscheduled training in specific tasks	0.157	0.403	0.232	0.318	.436 [*]
	0.463	0.051	0.276	0.130	0.033
Observe co-workers demonstration aspects of your job	0.275	0.282	0.197	.405 [*]	.436 [*]
	0.193	0.182	0.356	0.050	0.033
Collaborate or work as a team	.559 ^{**}	0.376	.476 [*]	.577 ^{**}	.667 ^{**}
	0.005	0.071	0.019	0.003	0.000
Receive feedback from peers	.491 [*]	0.268	0.309	.418 [*]	0.356
	0.015	0.206	0.141	0.042	0.088
Receive feedback from supervisor	.450 [*]	0.004	0.064	0.164	0.384
	0.027	0.984	0.765	0.443	0.064
Interact informally with your supervisor	.436 [*]	0.024	0.280	0.341	0.117
	0.033	0.910	0.185	0.103	0.587
Repeat the same tasks multiple times	0.283	0.211	0.220	0.105	-0.010
	0.181	0.321	0.302	0.626	0.961
Problem Solve	.575 ^{**}	.545 ^{**}	.576 ^{**}	.558 ^{**}	.515 [*]
	0.003	0.006	0.003	0.005	0.010
Experiment with new ideas	.665 ^{**}	0.332	0.348	0.398	.496 [*]
	0.000	0.113	0.096	0.054	0.014
Reflect about your job	.498 [*]	.441 [*]	0.334	0.286	0.090
	0.013	0.031	0.111	0.175	0.676
Make decisions based on your intuition or judgement as opposed to checking with supervisor	0.337	0.325	.447 [*]	0.320	.432 [*]
	0.108	0.121	0.028	0.128	0.035

Relate on-the-job tasks/experiences and what you're learning in your classes	0.225	0.079	0.050	0.187	0.101
	0.290	0.715	0.816	0.382	0.638

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of this table show significant correlations between many of the job tasks and learning domains. Problem solving showed significant levels across all learning domains making it the most significant job experience. Collaborate or work as a team was second, reporting significant correlations with all learning domains with the exception of civic and community engagement.

Discussion

The results of this study supported the hypothesis of more frequent on the job tasks would result in higher levels of perceived learning outcomes. The on-the-job experiences that were scored highest in frequency across all three positions, problem solving and collaborating, also showed significant relationships with all but one learning domain. With the variety of fundamental work tasks across all three positions such as: selling memberships, enforcing policy, communicating with patrons, responding to emergencies, overseeing employee schedules, and more, it makes sense that collaborating and problem solving came out on top.

An interesting finding involved both formal training and relation to classroom learning, where neither reported significant relationships with learning domains. There may be a few reasons for this. With recent budget cuts across the department there has been a major cutback on intentional job trainings such as shadow shifts, one-on-one's, staff meetings and other forms of direct trainings. This may have resulted in lower frequency ratings of formal training

experiences. Many of the participants were also from majors outside of exercise science, recreation or sport management. This may have resulted in less perceived impact on-the-job experiences at the Student Recreation Center have on their classroom academics. While these 13 on-the-job experiences are critical for all career fields, it can be more difficult for students to see the cross over when their career goals do not directly align with the work being done.

As a result of these findings, student employee supervisors must make a more intentional effort to incorporate a mindset of overall development and learning when approaching management, instead of stopping at training specific job skills. Incorporating training sessions focused on developing students' problem solving abilities and team work can help them to develop more confidence on a wider range of specific job tasks, also helping to increase the frequency of other experiences such as experimenting with new ideas, informal training, and make decisions based off of intuition.

Some limitations of this study were that all findings were self-reported by student employees. Therefore, some employees may experience these items at higher levels, however, do not have the confidence to explain that. While some students may realistically have lower competence levels of the domains and varied frequencies of job tasks when evaluated, but for the purpose of this study only self-reported data was collected.

Conclusion

The results of this exploratory case study helps reinforce the opportunity that collegiate recreation professionals have within the role of higher education, assisting in the multifaceted student learning experience. Professionals need to enhance their communication and delivery of training to encompass and overall learning and development experience for students to use both

within their positions as well as in the classroom and everyday life. The unique opportunity that collegiate recreation student jobs present in that of advanced problem solving, collaboration and task repetition needs to be framed in a way that fosters growth of students across discipline areas. Continuing to enhance delivery of job experiences will solidify collegiate recreation's important role within a higher education institution, as well as improve overall operations within departments employing staff that are bought into the opportunity as not just a way to earn additional money, but to develop lifelong skills needed to succeed past college.

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