



# BIG 10 INSTITUTION CAMPUS RECREATION: A REVIEW OF CURRENT VALUES, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES

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**Purpose:** *To systematically examine the institutional values and campus recreational policies and practices of all Big 10 institutions to determine whether equitable physical activity opportunities are being provided.* **Approach:** *Websites were systematically searched, and data extracted were analyzed using thematic analysis.* **Findings:** *Community (n=13) and diversity and inclusion (n=12), emerged among the most common institutional values. All but one institution funded campus recreation through mandatory student fees. Health and/or wellness (n = 12), recreation, activity, and/or fitness (n=12), and community (n=11) emerged as dominant themes, as did diversity and inclusion (n=9). Despite the proclaimed commitment to diversity and inclusion, one institution offered women-specific programming, and considerably more intramural sport opportunities were available for men.* **Implications:** *Findings indicate all students fund shortcomings regarding the provision of equitable student physical activity opportunities, especially given that campus recreation and that institutions purportedly value community, diversity, and inclusion.*

## INTRODUCTION

Physical activity declines over the course of the lifespan (Caspersen et al., 2000), especially during significant life transitions such as the transition from adolescence into adulthood (Han et al., 2008). Many pursue a post-secondary education during this transition (Institute for Education Sciences, 2017), a time during which physical activity declines considerably (Irwin, 2007; Small et al., 2013). Thus, colleges are important settings to promote the adoption of healthy, physically active lifestyles as the behaviors adopted during this period can influence individuals' lifelong health trajectories (Wood et al., 2018). Especially given the importance of physical activity for physical and mental health (Lee et al., 2012; Paluska and Schwenk, 2000) and the prevalence of mental health issues (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2019), obesity (American College Health Association, 2020), and hypertension (Morrell et al., 2012; Kamara et al., 2019) among students.

Campus recreation departments are a crucial component of college student physical activity promotion, as their policies, programs, and practices, as well as the facilities and amenities for which they are responsible, possess the potential to influence students' health behaviors. The importance of campus recreation departments is reinforced by the ineffectiveness of previous college student physical activity interventions (Maselli et al., 2018; Plotnikoff et al., 2015), which is mainly attributable to the targeting of intrapersonal (i.e., self-confidence, skills) or interpersonal factors. This approach is unlikely to be successful if environmental and policy factors prevent sustainable behavior change (King and Gonzalez, 2018; Sallis et al., 2008).

Concerning the environment, recreational facilities are spaces where gender inequities emerge, and both social and material gendered-lines separate men's and women's activities (Coen et al., 2018), with college facilities being no exception (Salvatore and Marecek, 2010). Comfort, knowledge, and competence, as well as unsolicited advice and interference, constrain participation in strength training among female college students (Stankowski et al., 2017; Peters et al., 2019; Coen et al., 2018; Wilson et al., In Press; Wilson et al., 2020). Masculine performances can also visually, sonically, and with energy crowd women out of such spaces (Coen et al., 2018). Regardless of their intent, such behaviors may contribute to recreational facilities being perceived as a hostile environment by students, in particular women, which has potential Title IX implications (Staurowsky, 2016).

The gender inequities evident in campus recreational facilities may contribute to the physical activity disparities observed among college students, where women have consistently been found to be significantly less physically active compared to men in the United States (US) (Grubbs and Carter, 2002; Miller et al., 2005; Suminski et al., 2002; McArthur and Raedeke, 2009; Wilson et al., 2019a) and around the world (e.g., El-Gilany et al., 2011; Dodd et al., 2010). Moreover, compared to men, women are significantly less likely to participate in intramural sports (Kiger, 1996; Center for the Study of Student Life, 2016), use campus recreational facilities (Miller et al., 2008; Milton and Patton, 2011; Zizzi et al., 2004; Smith, 2011; Ryerson Students' Union, 2014; Wilson et al., Revisions Under Review), and participate in muscle-strengthening activities (Suminski et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 2019b). Furthermore, the disparities mentioned above pertaining to cisgender men and women, but trans men and women, as well as other minority gender identities, should not be overlooked, especially given the disparities between cisgender and transgender individuals (Jones et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2018).

Pertaining to policies, implementation of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act lead to increased opportunities for women to participate in intercollegiate athletics, club sports, and intramural sport, and consequentially increased participation by women in such activities (McDowell et al., 2016). Title IX specifies that inter-scholastic, intercollegiate, club, and intramural athletes be provided equal athletic opportunities (United States Department of Justice, 1975), and is intended to reduce some of the disparities mentioned above. However, at present, there is inconsistent compliance with Title IX regulations, with evidence indicating that, though much improved, gender disparities exist in club (Schneider et al., 2014) and intramural sports (Schneider et al., 2014; Barcelona and Ross, 2002).

Title IX was intended to prevent discrimination based on gender in any federally funded education program or activity. Though Title IX was defined for intercollegiate athletics, its general principles apply to club sport and intramural programs as well (United States Department of Education, 1979). Whether Title IX extends to the use of campus recreational facilities and spaces has yet to be clarified or tested. However, Title IX requires institutions to take actions to prevent; gender discrimination, the creation of a hostile environment, and sexual harassment (including verbal and visual) which deny, limit, or interfere with an individual's ability to participate in, or benefit from, an activity or program (United States Department of Justice, 2001). Emerging evidence is accumulating to suggest that a case could be made concerning the current use of campus recreational facilities (Stankowski et al., 2017; Peters et al., 2019; Coen et al., 2018; Wilson et al., Revisions Under Review). Especially given Title IX requires institutions to take actions to prevent gender discrimination, the creation of a hostile environment, and sexual harassment (including verbal and visual) which deny, limit, or interfere with an individual's ability to participate in, or benefit from, an activity or program (United States Department of Justice, 2001).

The purpose of this review was to examine the campus recreation policies, programs, and practices of Big 10 post-secondary institution. While the goal was to review all policies, programs, and practices, particular attention was paid to policies, programs, and practices, or lack thereof, relevant to the provision of equitable physical activity opportunities. The Big 10 was selected as the focus of this review because Big 10 institutions hold an annual Big 10 Recreational Sports Conference and supposedly share a collective mission. It is hoped that the analysis can identify ways in which colleges can improve policies, programs, and practices in order to provide equitable opportunities for students to be physically active.

## METHODS

The websites of all Big 10 post-secondary institutions were systematically searched for information regarding campus recreation: mission statements and values, policies, student campus recreation membership fees, strategic plans, annual reports, women-specific programming, and intramural sport offerings. Websites were also systematically searched for information regarding overall institution values. Searches were conducted using the institution name and keywords pertaining to the information sought. The foundation for the search strategy is displayed in Table 1. The websites of each institution were initially searched to identify links to relevant information, which were copied into an Excel sheet. Then, the links for each topic of interest were opened, and relevant data extracted (copied) into an Excel sheet for subsequent reporting/analyses. For policies, student campus recreation membership fees, strategic plans, annual reports, women-specific programming, and intramural sport offerings. Checklists were created to note whether: policies were present or absent; how campus recreation fees were collected; whether strategic plans, annual reports, or women-specific programming were available; and the number of men's, women's, and co-ed intramural sports on offer. Mission statements and values required more intensive analyses; thus, thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used. Following familiarization with the text, the text was re-read many times to generate the initial set of codes during the process of open (exploratory) coding. Then, via axial coding, related codes were integrated around axes of higher-order central themes pertaining to mission statements and values.

Table 1. *Search strategy.*

University name	Campus recreation	Mission statement
		Values
		Policies
		Membership fees
		Strategic plan
		Intramural sport
		Annual report
		Women
	Mission statement	
Values		

## RESULTS

### Institution characteristics

Of the 14 Big 10 institutions, all but four are land grant institutions. More than half ( $n = 9$ ) have undergraduate enrolments of more than 30,000, and a further four have enrollments of more than 20,000 students. When graduate students are considered, all institutions exceed 20,000 students. Though variable, many Big 10 institutions are highly diverse with respect to gender and ethnicity (May, 2017).

### Institutional values

All colleges listed their institutional values online. The most common values concerned discovery, innovation and learning ( $n=13$ ), community ( $n=13$ ), diversity and inclusion ( $n=12$ ), excellence ( $n=12$ ), and respect ( $n=11$ ). The majority of institutions also stated integrity ( $n=9$ ) and responsibility ( $n=7$ ).

### Campus recreation mission statement and values

Twelve colleges provided a statement of their mission or values. Health and/or wellness ( $n = 12$ ), recreation,

activity, and/or fitness (n = 12), and community (n = 11) emerged as dominant themes, as did diversity and inclusion (n = 9). The creation of a welcoming/safe environment (n = 3), as well as sustainability (n = 2), were also mentioned by multiple institutions.

## Policies

Policy application was somewhat inconsistent. Clothing policies were reported by less than half institutions, and referred to minimum clothing requirements (e.g., wearing an upper-body garment), as well as clothing that is not at risk of getting trapped in equipment. Photography restrictions concerned the total restriction of photography or the need to seek permission before taking photos. Personal training restrictions were intended to prevent non-staff members from providing services within facilities. Only half of the institutions reported policies pertaining to harassment. Just over half of institutions were found to have an advisory committee that included student representatives. Less than half of the institutions reported policies relating to disability accommodations. Finally, only four institutions reported policies concerning inclusivity, and only two reported providing all-gender locker rooms/restrooms (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Campus recreation policies.*

	n	%
Clothing policy	6	42.86
Photography restrictions	7	50.00
Personal training restrictions	6	42.86
Harassment	7	50.00
Advisory Committee (including student representatives)	8	57.14
Disability accommodations	6	42.86
Inclusivity policy	4	28.57
All Gender locker rooms/restrooms	2	14.29

## Planning, fees, and programming

A campus recreation strategic plan was found for only one college, with reporting (i.e., minutes or annual reports) found for four. Campus recreation memberships were included in students' university fees at all but one college. Only one institution reported providing women-specific programming. The intramural sport offerings of 11 institutions were found for at least one semester. Analyses of offerings found that, collectively, there were 40% more intramural sport leagues available exclusively for men compared to the number available exclusively for women. Disparities in offerings varied greatly. Three institutions provided equal offerings, a single university provided more offerings for women, while the remaining seven offered more offerings for men. The most significant disparity was at an institution that offered nine leagues for men and none for women.

## DISCUSSION

On the whole, campus recreation mission statements and values were relatively consistent, though varied in terms of depth and prominence on websites. There appears to be room for improvement with respect to acknowledging diversity and inclusion in such statements. The inconsistency with which fairly standard policies, such as those pertaining to clothing, photography, personal training services, and harassment was surprising. Especially given the Big 10 holds an annual recreational sports conference that aims to reaffirm the collective mission of institutions with respect to campus recreation (e.g., Northwestern University Athletics and Recreation, 2019). As far as student input, evidence suggests that several institutions either do not value student input or do not advertise the opportunity for students to provide feedback into campus recreational planning through participation in, or communication with representatives on, an advisory committee.

A minimal number offered all-gender locker rooms/restrooms or had policies pertaining to inclusivity, and a single university had women's specific programming. The latter is concerning given that, except for a single institution, Big 10 institutions fund campus recreation by way of a mandatory student fee, of which a portion was attributed to campus recreation. It is worth noting that both the amount and the portion of this fee relative to the entire student fee varied considerably between institutions. While removing the financial barrier to using campus recreation programs and facilities is positive in some respects, many students are now left paying for access to facilities and programs without a choice, regardless of whether they use, or feel uncomfortable using, them.

The finding that women may feel uncomfortable using campus recreational facilities, or even spaces within them (Salvatore and Marecek, 2010; Stankowski et al., 2017; Peters et al., 2019; Coen et al., 2018; Wilson et al., Revisions Under Review) has potential Title IX implications (Staurowksy, 2016). Especially in light of the lacking sexual harassment policies at some institutions in this review. Findings pertaining to intramurals suggest that some institutions are potentially in breach of Title IX in other ways (United States Department of Education, 1979). Administrators may claim that women can participate in co-recreation leagues or that there is insufficient demand to offer women's leagues. Some women may not desire to compete against men, and modifications to sporting rules (e.g., smaller team sizes) could facilitate the formation of some women's only leagues. Moreover, given the comparative size of Big 10 institutions, that some institutions can offer women's leagues in given sports shows that there is little to no reason others could not do the same. With respect to campus recreational facility use, resolving the ambiguity of Title IX stands as an essential step to ensuring the provision of equitable physical activity opportunities.

Regarding overall institutional values, some values, such as community and diversity and inclusion, were consistent with themes that emerged campus recreation mission statement and values. However, it is noteworthy that such themes emerged as less common in analyses of campus recreation department mission statements and values compared to overall institutional values. This finding suggests a disconnect between the importance that institutions, and the departments within them, place on values and how those values may be reflected in the policies and practices of departments.

This review is not without limitations, namely the reliance on information reported in institution websites. However, the information found online is at worst outdated, given that all institutions reported their values, all but two reported their campus recreation values and mission statement, and all reported some policies. Future researchers may want to consider contacting campus recreation staff as well as students to examine to what extent campus recreation departments are providing equitable opportunities to be active.

In summary, there is considerable room for improvement on the part of Big 10 institutions with respect to addressing known physical activity and health disparities; and, it would appear that there is a disconnect between stating and upholding the supposed values of equity, diversity, and inclusion on the part of institutional and campus recreational leaders. Future researchers should consider examining the reasons underpinning the apparent disconnect between what institutions "say" and what institutions "do" concerning the promotion of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Understanding why there is an apparent disconnect would be a good starting point for future research. Researchers should also seek to clarify or test whether Title IX extends to the use of campus recreational facilities and spaces or conduct research that will support such clarification or testing. An issue that may be encountered when examining Title IX in relation to campus recreation is that inequities attributable to a combination of gender and another socio-demographic characteristic (e.g., race, religion, sexual orientation) currently fall outside of the purview of Title IX. This is not to say that an individual's socio-demographic characteristics cause inequities, but rather that existing policies and legislation are at risk of perpetuating inequities (Crenshaw, 1989). Finally, researchers may want to consider the extent to which campus recreation policies, programs, and procedures vary based on institutional characteristics, such as size, location, public vs. private, etc.

In the interim, campus recreation departments and staff should remember their overarching mission, to promote student health and wellness, and that all students fund campus recreation. Therefore, all students should have an equitable opportunity to be physically active. In particular, the provision of *equal* access to facilities and

programs should not be confused with *equity*. As evidenced by consistently reported disparities in use of campus recreational facilities (Miller et al., 2008; Milton and Patton, 2011; Zizzi et al., 2004; Smith, 2011; Ryerson Students' Union, 2014; Wilson et al., Revisions Under Review) opportunities are not equitable. Campus recreation departments and staff should begin to explore innovative policies and programs to reduce these inequities proactively, and, when successful, disseminate them to other institutions.

## CONCLUSION

College is an important stage in life where it is essential to promote the establishment of healthy lifestyle behaviors among young adults. However, there appears to be much room for improvement with respect to the provision of equitable opportunities for students to be physically active. Acknowledgment of diversity and inclusion in campus recreation department mission statements represents a good starting point, but programs and resources that promote both diversity and inclusion, both of which appear to be lacking, must support these statements. As such, campus recreation departments should take a closer look at whether their policies, programs, and practices are upholding the purported values of diversity and inclusion. Given all students at many institutions contribute to the funding of campus recreation, institutions arguably have a moral, and potentially legal, obligation to provide all students access to opportunities to be physically active. National organizations, as well as institutions, higher education administrators, and student affairs professionals, all have important roles to play in upholding the purported values of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

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