Ways to Provide Quality Physical Activity Courses for College Students

Sukho Lee
Texas A&M International University
and
Myung-Ah Lee
Indiana State University

Abstract
The purpose of this article is to explore ways to improve physical activity courses for college students. To assess student needs, we asked three major questions to 148 students from four different colleges and got results as follows: (1) The most preferred physical activity course was identified as swimming (51.3%) followed by tennis (11.1%), (2) A swimming facility is needed the most, second to jogging trail, (3) More than a half of the students (49.6%) indicated that they prefer to take classes in the morning between 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m.

Introduction
Which factors would college students consider the most when they take physical activity courses? A couple of factors might be the kind of activity courses that they would prefer to take, and the time they would want to take. These are important questions students should be thinking about in order to organize their campus life, while simultaneously meeting the university course requirement.

From the program standpoint there might be many challenges to fully consider all student needs. Facilities, resources, or unique needs of student population can be major factors in making administrative decisions (Franklin et al., 2002). Thus, it is important to identify challenges and student needs (Barefoot, 2000). To resolve any problems more details must be gathered. For example, which facilities might have the first priority and which content related resources do we need to recruit more of? To resolve our own challenges in our institution we initiated this project at Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) at Laredo. There has been an active move toward program innovation in the Fitness and Sports program at TAMIU at Laredo (Lee, 2007).

Various physical activity courses have been offered in the Fitness and Sports program at TAMIU. Those are Aerobic Activity, Weight Training and Conditioning, Swimming, Golf, Tennis, Martial Art and Kick Boxing class. We believe those activity courses have provided ample opportunities for students to participate in regular physical activity and further contribute to an active lifestyle. However, we wanted to be more sensitive to students’ needs to improve our program. To provide a program of quality it is essential to administer the needs assessment, and more importantly that those findings be reflected to the program. We developed a survey questionnaire to ask what students need when they take activity courses. This article will address our findings from the survey and discuss possible changes and implications for the program for the future.

Method
As the first step we developed a questionnaire to assess students’ needs. Three major questions were generated. The first question was what types of physical activity courses students would prefer to take part in the most in the Fitness and Sports program. The next question was
which facilities should be updated at our institution. The third question was the time students would prefer to take these activity courses at.

Through several revision processes the questionnaire was refined and we got the IRB approval for administering this survey. University wide 148 males and females were recruited for this study and a consent form for participation were signed and obtained from each survey participant.

We used a cluster sampling technique and 37 subjects from four different colleges (n=148) in our institution were randomly assigned to complete the survey. To generate meaningful information from the survey data we conducted a data analysis using the SPSS software program package. A descriptive statistic was used to obtain frequency, means, percentage, and standard deviation. Major findings are described in the following section in terms of the student preference of activity, facility, and course schedule time.

Results

The most preferred physical activity course was identified as swimming (51.3 %) followed by tennis (11.1 %). Sport dance was another favorable activity (10.3 %). We asked the participants to select their 3 most favorable activity courses and rank them from first to third by preference. The data reflects some interesting patterns. The result was illustrated in the figure 1 (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Percentage of Student Preference of physical activity course (%)](image)

The student responses about the preferred facilities showed that a swimming facility is needed the most in our institution. Students also wanted to have a jogging trail and it was ranked as the second favorable facility to have. The third choice was tennis.

In terms of time preference, as to the activity course, more than a half of the students (49.6%) indicated that they prefer to take classes in the morning between 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. About 28.2% of students wanted to take activity classes in the evening (Figure 2).
Therefore, over 80% of students prefer to take classes either in the morning or evening. The third preference appeared between 3:00-6:00pm (17.9%).

**Discussion**

Based on the data some possible changes were discussed for physical activity courses. In addition to the current swimming courses we may need to increase the number of sections. Considering the geographic location and weather factors, the swimming preference was not a big surprise. Laredo experiences an average high temperature of about 99-101 °F, and an average low of about 74-75 °F during summer (The Weather Channel, 2009).

Also those additional swimming class sections will provide more flexible time schedule for commuting students who want to take physical activity courses in the morning or late evening.

A new course development is highly recommended for tennis and sport dance. The absence of tennis courts is a big barrier in offering tennis classes. Considering we have significant number of people who want to play tennis and also University tennis club plays in local tennis court, we may definitely need to build a new facility as soon as possible. Sport dance is already offered as a part of recreational activity program in our program and it is a rising popular activity class. However, it is not offered as regular physical activity course. Therefore, we may need to develop and offer several sports dance classes to meet student needs.

The jogging trail was also identified as a favorable facility for students to have although it is not directly related to physical activity courses. It seems that students want to utilize that facility outside of class time as well. Constructing a new jogging trail will definitely benefit and motivate students in participating in a regular activity.

From the survey we found that students in our institution prefer to take activity classes in the morning (between 09:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m.). Considering the majority of the activity courses in the Fitness and Sports program are offered between 3:00 and 07:00 p.m., preference of morning classes was a surprising discovery. Some students could possibly have a schedule conflict if we offer activity courses in the morning. For example, senior groups who are taking their student teaching or internship will not be able to take any activity courses. They should complete activity course requirement before they begin the internship or student teaching. The other issue could be some possible inconvenience for commuting students. Over 80% of the students are non-traditional students who usually work day time and come to school in the evenings. For those students the current activity course schedule between 3:00-7:00 p.m. would be adjusted to the evening time that will be better. In conclusion it might be reasonable to offer several course sections in either morning time or evening time to meet all student needs.

---

**Figure 2. Time Preferences of Physical Activity Course.**

Therefore, over 80% of students prefer to take classes either in the morning or evening. The third preference appeared between 3:00-6:00pm (17.9%).
We examined what students need and how we can best accommodate to their needs. Some implementations may be quick and easy like activity course scheduling. Some other changes may take a longer time since there are complicated steps related to administration level of approval and financial support. But we know where we move ahead and keep going to accomplish our ultimate goal, “Wellness and Fitness.”
Reference
Barefoot, B. O. (2000). The first-year experience-are we making it any better? About Campus, 4 (6), 12-18

Acknowledgements
The authors thank Mrs. Jennifer Batey for excellent technical assistance. This study was supported by Texas A&M Research Foundation Grant P336B990084 to Dr. Sukho Lee (PI: Dr. Humberto González).