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Perceived Problems in Campus Recreation Programs in North America

**Robert C. Schneider, William F. Stier Jr., Steve Kampf,
Gregory Wilding, and Scott Haines**

Major problems in campus recreation programs were investigated. The participants were 269 campus recreation directors in colleges and universities throughout North America. Participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed, disagreed, or had no opinion regarding statements presented to them on a survey that consisted of the following three general problem areas in campus recreation: (a) conflict, (b) equipment, and (c) miscellaneous. The campus recreation directors identified six specific major problems, at the highest rates, from the three general problem categories as follows: "equipment"—lack of storage areas (59%); "miscellaneous"—availability of parking (59%); availability of athletic training staff (56%); marketing and promotional efforts (50%); "conflict"—turf wars (49%); and conflict with athletic department personnel (46%). Campus recreation directors should, first and foremost, address the above major problem areas, in order to effectively manage their programs.

Key Words: directing, conflict, equipment, athletics, personnel, college

Campus recreation directors are constantly faced with problems throughout the process of managing and directing their programs. If the most common major problems in college and university campus recreation programs can be identified, discussed, and ultimately resolved, the campus recreation director will be more equipped to manage and direct their programs. In this study, based on responses from campus recreation directors, major problems related to campus recreation programs in North America were identified and discussed. Through their responses to a survey, campus recreation directors indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following areas related to their campus recreation programs as being major problems: (a) conflict, (b) equipment, and (c) miscellaneous areas.

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Background Information

Conflict

Facility usage, maintenance, and security were identified by Langley and Hawkins (2004) as specific areas of conflict that relate to personnel within recreation facilities. As a means to provide a programmer with adequate time to eliminate conflicts and control use levels, Mull, Bayless, Ross, and Jamieson (1997) suggested that advance notice of the needs of facilities be provided. Mull et al. also pointed out the importance of setting priorities for facility use prior to approving facility reservation requests.

Equipment

Lack of equipment maintenance and storage space can result in problems for campus recreation directors. Dahlgren (2000) addressed several maintenance procedures related to fitness equipment including replacement procedures, adjustments, lubrication, and an overall preventive maintenance program. Peterson (1999) pointed out the downfalls of not having ample equipment storage space, such as limited opportunities for users and the burden of converting activity space to equipment storage space.

Miscellaneous

Safety issues (risk management) associated with campus recreation have been addressed from the legal and quality of service perspective. In today's litigious society, it is extremely important that facility administrators know what they can do to reduce costly legal claims and lawsuits (Eickhoff-Shemek, & Deja, 2000). In a study that surveyed all intramural sports directors who were members of the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA), Lee (1999) found that many directors indicated that their risk management plan improved the quality of services for the participants. According to Connaughton, DeMichele, Horodyski, and Dannecker (2002) by reducing injuries, deaths, and liability, recreational sports and fitness facilities are more enjoyable places to work, to exercise, and play.

When examining vandalism, theft, and security issues associated with campus recreation sites and activities Lewis, Barcelona, and Jones (2001) focused on three security concerns that should be addressed in any campus recreation facility: people, procedures, and hardware. An overwhelming number of institutions reported illegal entry into campus recreation centers as a major security issue (Lewis, et al.). Other challenges reported were theft, vandalism, fights, and sexual harassment (Lewis, et al.) as criminal activities that occurred in recreation centers. Patton (1997) suggested that the number of entrance and exit points in a recreation facility should be minimal, and the center should have easy flow and security alarm systems for non-supervised doors. Stolovitch (1995) suggested that security design should not be considered as an add-on, as this can result in increased cost and vulnerability to potential security-related lawsuits.

Vincent and Kearney (2001) not only addressed sportsmanship as it relates to conflict and the program's success, but also in a way that relates it to the safety of

both participants and employees. Vincent and Kearney also emphasized the importance of creating a well-defined model with established consequences assigned to specific actions allowing for effective evaluation of sportsmanship to take place.

Methods

Participants

The sample consisted of all 682 campus recreation directors throughout North America and was identified through the NIRSA office in Corvallis, Oregon. The campus recreation directors returned 269 of the total 682 surveys, a return rate of 39%.

Surveys were returned from six regions throughout the country with the highest percentage of returned surveys coming from Region I (23%), and Region II (23%); the remaining surveys came from Region III (14%), Region IV (16%), Region V (7%), and Region VI (16%).

The data consisted of three categories of institutions: urban (44%), suburban (28%), and rural (28%). The majority of the participants were employed at public institutions (70%) while 30% were employed at private institutions. Enrollment at the educational institutions was reported to range from 900 to 46,000 with the average enrollment being 11,563. Campus recreation directors reported to four different named bodies: student affairs (62%), athletics (24%), academics (6%), and business (1%).

The time of employment of campus recreation directors at their present educational institution was an average of 11 years, ranging from a low of 1 year to a high of 39 years. Before becoming the campus recreation director, the respondents indicated that they worked an average of 8 years in campus recreation with full-time status.

On average the directors have five full-time professional staff available, with the low being none and the high being 100. The average number of graduate assistants working for campus recreation was 2, with some programs having none and others having as many as 30. The average number of secretarial staff members (or the full-time equivalent) reported as working in campus recreation was 1.5, with zero being reported as the low and 20 the high. There was an average of 5 students per program who were part of the campus recreation secretarial staff work force.

Instrumentation

An initial survey was drafted based on: (a) literature related to problem areas in campus recreation, and (b) first-hand knowledge of the researchers based on their professional experiences as directors and managers. Next, for the purpose of feedback and to help ensure content validity, the draft was forwarded to a panel of five experts, each currently employed at different universities, with at least 10 years experience as campus recreation directors. Upon receiving and incorporating the experts' feedback, the survey instrument was finalized. The final instrument was a five-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*.

Analysis

Problems perceived to exist in campus recreation programs were analyzed through descriptive statistics. Rates at which campus recreation directors agreed or disagreed that selected areas of campus recreation were major problems are presented in the following section. The Likert scale was collapsed into the following three categories: “*Agree*,” “*No Opinion*,” and “*Disagree*” merely to give an indication as to whether the directors were in agreement, disagreement, or did not hold an opinion regarding the statement.

Results

Conflict

Displayed in Table 1 are the rates at which campus recreation directors agreed or disagreed that selected areas of conflict were major problems in their campus recreation programs. Directors agreeing or disagreeing that each of the five conflict areas were major problems in campus recreation were mixed. The majority of the directors disagreed that the following three areas of conflict were major problems: conflict with physical education or personnel (63%), conflict with special events—priority usage (61%), and conflict with maintenance department (58%). Of the five conflict areas, the directors agreed at the highest rates that territorial conflict with athletic department personnel known as “turf wars” (49%) and conflict with athletic department personnel (46%) were major problems in campus recreation.

Equipment

Presented in Table 2 are the rates at which campus recreation directors agreed or disagreed that selected areas related to equipment were major problems in their

Table 1 Conflict Areas As Major Problems: Rates of Agreement and Disagreement

	Agreed	No Opinion	Disagreed
1. Territorial conflict with other departments (turf wars)	49%	12%	39%
2. Conflict with athletic department or personnel	46%	12%	42%
3. Conflict with physical education or personnel	19%	18%	63%
4. Conflict with maintenance department	29%	13%	58%
5. Conflict with special event – priority usage	29%	10%	61%

**Table 2 Equipment Areas As Major Problems:
Rates of Agreement and Disagreement**

	Agreed	No Opinion	Disagreed
1. Availability of equipment and supplies	25%	5%	70%
2. Maintenance of equipment and supplies	33%	11%	56%
3. Storage (lack of) area for equipment and supplies	59%	6%	35%
4. Inventory procedures and policies	22%	14%	64%

campus recreation programs. Of the four equipment areas surveyed, the majority of directors (59%) agreed that the storage area (lack of) for equipment and supplies was a major problem. Approximately two-thirds of the directors disagreed (70%) that availability of equipment and supplies and inventory of procedures and policies (64%) were major problems while well over half (56%) disagreed that the maintenance of equipment and supplies was a major problem.

Miscellaneous

The rates at which campus recreation directors agreed or disagreed that selected miscellaneous areas were major problems in their campus recreation programs are presented in Table 3. Specifically included under miscellaneous were the following 11 problem areas: (a) institutional budgeting process/procedures and policies relating to campus recreation; (b) marketing and promotional efforts (on campus) for campus recreation; (c) evaluation of program/activities; (d) student apathy toward campus recreation; (e) competing with other activities on campus for time and interest of students; (f) availability of parking; (g) sportsmanship of participants in campus recreation; (h) vandalism, theft, and security issues associated with campus recreation sites and activities; (i) safety issues (risk management) associated with campus recreation; (j) availability of athletic training staff for campus recreation; and (k) unauthorized use of campus recreation facilities.

At least half of the directors agreed that the following three areas labeled as miscellaneous were major problems: availability of parking (59%); availability of athletic training staff for campus recreation (56%); and marketing and promotional efforts (on-campus) for campus recreation (50%). The majority of the directors disagreed that the following four areas in the miscellaneous category were major problems in campus recreation programs: evaluation of program/activities (63%), student apathy toward campus recreation (63%); vandalism, theft, and security issues associated with campus recreation sites and activities (62%); and sportsmanship of participants in campus recreation (51%).

**Table 3 Miscellaneous Areas As Major Problems:
Rates of Agreement and Disagreement**

	Agreed	No Opinion	Disagreed
1. Institutional budgeting process/ procedures and policies relating to Campus Recreation	48%	9%	43%
2. Marketing and promotional efforts (on campus) for Campus Recreation	50%	7%	43%
3. Evaluation of program/activities	18%	19%	63%
4. Student apathy toward Campus Recreation	23%	14%	63%
5. Competing with other activities on campus for time and interest of students	44%	10%	46%
6. Availability of parking	59%	8%	33%
7. Sportsmanship of participants in Campus Recreation	38%	11%	51%
8. Vandalism, theft, and security issues associated with Campus Recreation sites and activities	27%	11%	62%
9. Safety issues (risk management) associated with Campus Recreation	44%	11%	45%
10. Availability of athletic training staff for Campus Recreation	56%	23%	21%
11. Unauthorized use of Campus Recreation facilities	44%	10%	46%

Discussion

Conflict

The two areas that were identified by nearly half of the campus recreation directors as being problems were territorial conflict with other departments (turf wars) (49%), and conflict with athletic department or personnel (46%). These two areas share similarities. Conflict with athletic departments or personnel, at times, may result from territorial conflict (turf wars). As campus recreation directors and athletic directors persevere to reach the goals of their programs, struggles take place that might result in conflict. Also, one might argue that unless conflict is prolonged, it is not necessarily detrimental to the department or program. Conflict may be magnified if decisions concerning matters for which both departments compete—such as budgets, resources, and facility space—are made arbitrarily by high-level

administrators. Even when decisions are made under a model of gender equity, if the decisions buck the tradition of gender inequities, magnified and prolonged conflict may result. To resolve such areas of conflict one might act as Langley and Hawkins (2004) suggested: address conflict in a proactive manner through open, honest communication. Langley and Hawkins go on to say that conflict can be reduced through a policy guide.

Equipment

In this study, well over half (59%) of the campus recreation directors agreed that storage area (lack of) for equipment and supplies was a major problem. Peterson (1999) supports this finding by indicating that providing ample storage space can alleviate major headaches (problems) for facility personnel. Without adequate storage areas for equipment, directors must either create more space or make purchases that replace old equipment, rather than add new equipment to a supply that is already exceeding its storage space capacity.

Peterson (1999) concurred with the notion that lack of storage space can be more than just an inconvenience by stating that it can also limit opportunities. When activity areas are converted to storage space, if scheduling cannot effectively be manipulated, certain activities may have to be eliminated. Another solution—storing equipment in activity areas—creates a risk to participants that could very well result in negligence. Dahlgren (2000) pointed out that improperly working equipment may create a litigious environment and may also cause customers to be disgruntled.

Miscellaneous

In this study, 62% of the campus recreation directors disagreed that vandalism, theft, and security issues associated with campus recreation sites and activities were a problem. This somewhat contradicts the literature. A study that surveyed 100 randomly selected campus recreation directors of four-year colleges revealed that campus recreation centers are plagued with a number of security problems ranging from thefts to illegal entry and directors must be ready for any security problem that may arise (Lewis et al., 2001). The same study provided evidence that there is limited use of security protocol in many college and university recreation centers (Lewis et al.).

This study showed that half (50%) of the directors agreed that on-campus marketing and promotional efforts for campus recreation is a problem. Programs might feel the pressure to market more today than in the past since the technological capabilities of web pages and e-mail are readily available. If programs fail to incorporate these electronic capabilities into their marketing and promotional efforts, they might perceive a problem to exist. Taylor, Wood, Hutton, Wood, Huck, and Smith (1998) further emphasized the complexities involved in current-day marketing plans when tracing the evolution of recreational sports marketing plans into the elaborate current-day comprehensive marketing plans that incorporate the identification of target markets.

Directors in this study disagreed at a rate of 45% that safety issues (risk management) associated with campus recreation were a problem. Campus officials are obviously aware of the importance of risk management in operating a safe,

high-quality program for participants as well as a litigation-free program for the directors. Studies reiterate the importance of operating a risk management plan within campus recreation programs. In a study that surveyed intramural directors of four-year public universities it was pointed out that a formal risk management plan can reduce the injury rates of participants and provide safe services for participants (Lee, 1999). Researchers in another study surveyed 178 campus sport and recreation programs throughout the United States who were members of NIRSA and found that a desire to operate a safe facility and an awareness of the importance of risk management and its impact on liability reduction is evident within programs (Mulrooney, Styles, & Green, 2002).

In this study, over half (51%) of the directors disagreed that sportsmanship of campus recreation participants was a problem. Although current literature does not specifically describe sportsmanship as a problem, there is substantial literature addressing sportsmanship. Maintaining good sportsmanship and control over the events is a critical element in the retention of intramural participants (Vincent & Kearney, 2001). The University of Southern Mississippi Intramural Sports Handbook (1998) outlines a sportsmanship model that delineates mandatory penalties for specific actions and focuses on individual participants and not teams as a whole.

Implications and Recommendations

Conflict

In the area of conflict, both territorial conflict with other departments in general (turf wars) and conflict with the athletic department or personnel appear to be areas that need to be improved upon within campus recreation programs. Fair management by all departments—including athletic departments—can reduce conflict that surrounds campus recreation programs. One recommendation is to disclose and articulate departmental goals that are aligned with the mission of the educational institution as a means to prevent the onset of conflict. However, to actually be effective in alleviating the types of conflict being discussed, there must be an acceptance of the established goals of departments on campus as well as a willingness to behave in a cooperative, respectful, and civil manner toward and with co-workers.

Establishing a positive rapport and a fair-minded working relationship is recommended to help prevent conflict with athletic departments. Getting to know the athletic director personally and developing a reputation for being honest and fair can help establish a professional relationship based on mutual respect. Furthermore, such action can help prevent conflict between campus recreation directors and athletic directors. Even if conflict has taken place in the past between campus recreation and athletics, campus recreation directors must continue to work with athletic departments in a reasonable and positive manner.

As campus recreation directors build quality programs, advocating and bringing exposure to their programs will also bring about a level of respect from other departments on campus, including athletics, potentially helping prevent conflict. Campus recreation directors should be advocates for their programs both internally and externally. Within the institution, directors should serve as spokespersons to athletics and high-level administrators, while advocating externally at state, regional, and national conferences.

Equipment

The number one problem related to equipment was a lack of storage space for equipment and supplies. Although storage areas are more readily planned for in new facilities, when facility construction runs over budget, storage areas run the risk of being eliminated. To ensure that adequate storage areas are included in facilities, they must be made a priority early in the planning process. Often, upon careful analysis, storage space can be used more efficiently. Short of adding on to the facility, and negotiating with other departments or units for more storage space, the options are somewhat limited. It is, however, recommended that when making the case to high-level administrators for more storage space, the argument should be based on the notion that the proposed increase in space will contribute to the achievement of the overall goals of the institution. Along similar lines, if it can be proven that program enhancement and revenue generation will result from the addition of storage areas, those in positions to make such changes will, most likely, be more receptive. Finally, high-level administrators are more likely to be receptive to proposals calling for increased storage space if convincing arguments can be made that indicate that there is a risk for liability without the increase.

Miscellaneous

If new parking lot construction is to take place, it is recommended that a convincing argument be made that the investment to undertake such a high cost endeavor will result in direct or indirect capital gains. If adequate parking cannot accommodate the student demand for campus recreation programs, other options will have to be entertained. Directors might consider shuttle services from residence halls to competition or event venues, or examine the possibility of relocating some event venues closer to student housing for the purpose of providing better accommodations to the students. If students are required to walk long distances to event venues, directors must ensure that the safety of students is provided for by providing such measures as adequate security, lighting, and emergency calling stations along the walking route.

Directors may have to educate high-level administrators to the necessity of having competent athletic training staff available during competitions. Heightening the awareness of high-level administrators to the reality that litigation can result from the lack of adequate on-site medical care for student participants will support the director's case for additional athletic training staff.

Marketing and promotional efforts (on-campus) for campus recreation must begin with the director. Directors must assume a leadership role in marketing and promoting their programs. Personal traits that should be embodied by the director are enthusiasm and a genuine passion for campus recreation. Students may also serve as a resource to meet the marketing and promotional needs of the program. If a director articulates a clearly envisioned marketing and promotional plan to students, students will, with rare exception, carry out the plans effectively. Most essential is that the directors have an understanding of marketing and promotions and that students involved in orchestrating the plan have an interest in and commitment to the plan. Locating and selecting students who are required to complete marketing or promotional assignments can be a first step in a marketing or promotional campaign for a campus recreation program.

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