

Student Voices for Why College Students' Take Physical Activity Classes When it is not required for Graduation

探討大學生對體育科的態度

David BARNEY Kelsey Higginson

Brigham Young University, U.S.A.



Abstract

The time in college is a time to prepare to go out into the world and be a contributing member of society. Typically, a college education should take four years to complete. Many colleges are eliminating the physical activity requirement for graduation, hoping that it will aid the student in graduating in a timely manner. Yet, students still take physical activity classes while working towards graduation. For this study 420 college students (235 males & 185 females) participated in this study. Students in physical activity classes at a private university of the western United States completed a survey in regards to why they take physical activity classes even when it is not required for graduation. The surveys asked the student's respond and explain why they are taking physical activity classes. Generally, it was found that students take physical activity classes to have fun along with other reasons.

Introduction

The attendance of college is important for the fact that a student is prepared and trained to go out into the world in their selected specialty and contribute to society in a meaningful manner. For this preparation many parents would hope a college education would take four years to acquire. During the student's college experience, the student will take classes in the humanities, mathematics, the sciences, history and a number of other academic topics. The last two years of the student's education is usually classes specific to their major. The major classes are specifically presented to prepare the student to the work in the world or continuing on with graduate studies.

Many colleges and universities are looking for ways to assist college student's graduating in four years. One-way colleges and universities are trying to assist college student's in this matter is not requiring students to take physical activity courses for graduation. Cardinal, Sorensen and Cardinal (2012) studied physical activity courses at 2,020 four-year colleges and universities in the United States. Only 39.6% required a physical activity course to earn a baccalaureate degree. In theory, the

elimination of these courses for college students not being required to take one or two physical activity classes can assist in college students graduating in four years. Yet, if physical activity classes are not required for graduation, are college students missing out on anything? Research has abundantly shown that physical activity helps decrease risks of chronic and prevalent diseases, such as cardiovascular disease (Conroy, Cook, Manson, et. al., 2005; Kahn, Ramsey, Brownson, et. al., 2002; Pate et. al., 1995), Type II diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis, depression (American College of Sports Medicine, 2006; Kahn et. al., 2002), hypertension and high cholesterol (US Department of Health & Human Services, 1996). Barney and McGaha (2006) have stated that colleges and universities physical activity classes can serve as the last opportunity to influence college students to be physically active throughout their lives. These classes also provide college students the opportunity to be physically active while they attend to their college education.

The authors teach at a university that does not require students to take a physical activity class to graduate. Yet, the university offers an extensive amount of physical activity classes to the student body. The

classes range from team sports, to individual sports and recreational sport activities. Even with the graduation requirement requiring no physical activity class, a large percentage of the students still sign-up and attend the physical activity classes. How is it that college student's still sign-up and attend physical activity classes when they are not required for graduation?

To better help understand why college students take physical activity classes when they are not required for graduation, the self-determination theory of motivation can be beneficial. The self-determination theory attempts to explain both the "what and why" of goal pursuits (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 228). The basic idea of this theory is that individuals are most likely to engage in behaviors (activities) when they are self-determined or acting out of their own will and choice. Within the self-determination theory there is competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Thus helping solidifying the theory. Competence is as defined as the need to have and impact on our surroundings, which are manifest in significant results in the environment (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This is when a person feels they will be successful in their chosen activity. Autonomy as defined by Guay, Vallerand, and Blanchard (2000, pp. 177-178) as "a sense of feeling free from pressures and to have the possibility to make choices among several courses of action." Here the person makes choices and decisions according to what they want to do. And relatedness is when the social environment either enhances or diminishes intrinsic motivation by fulfilling or failing to meet the psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness. With the results from previous research and the explanation of the self-determination theory the purpose of this study is to replicate Weinfeldt and Visek's (2009) study by asking why college students take physical activity classes when it is not required for graduation, for the purpose of strengthening the literature in regards to the importance physical activity is to the college student population. A secondary purpose of this study was to hear student voices for why they take college physical activity classes when they are not required for graduation.

Methods

Participants

A total of 420 college students (235 males & 185 females) from a private university located in the western United States participated in this study. The university Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval to conduct this study. All participants were enrolled in one of nine different university physical activity classes. The following activity classes participated in the study: basketball, bowling, cycling (spin), flexibility, jogging, soccer, swimming, volleyball, and weight training.

Instrumentation

For this study the researchers used two separate surveys (Weinfeldt & Visek, 2009 & Nicole, Leenders, Sherman, & Ward, 2003) from previous research dealing with college students participation in physical activity classes. The researchers reviewed two surveys and created a 16-statement survey for the purpose of this study. The survey consisted of a stem, which was "I took this STAC (Student Activity Class) class..." For each survey statement answer option were from a Likert scale of SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, NA=Not Applicable, D=Disagree, and SD=Strongly Disagree. If the student answered the survey statement with either a "Strongly Agree" or "Agree", the student was asked to explain their answer for that particular statement (See Table 1). The survey statements were found to be valid and reliable (Weinfeldt & Visek, 2009 & Nicole, Leenders, Sherman, & Ward, 2003).

Procedures

Convenience sampling was employed to collect data for the study, upon gaining IRB approval the researchers contacted the instructors for the physical activity classes explaining both the study and survey, requesting their assistance. After obtaining instructor permission, the researcher attended each physical activity class and administered the survey, taking approximately 10 minutes to complete. Before survey administration, the researchers explained the study to the students, asking for volunteers. For this study 99% of the students agreed to participate in the study. They were assured that their voluntary decision to participate or not participate in the study would not affect their grade in the class or class standing.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were derived from the survey. A second method of data analysis was analyzing the college students written responses to their responses to the survey statements. All qualitative data were first examined using inductive content analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 & Sarvela & McDermott, 1983) in order to identify emerging themes. Next, the constant comparative method (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) was employed, first to categorize then compare and contrast each unit of information with all other units of information with the intent of linking those with similar meanings.

Results

Descriptive statistics were used to better understand why college students take physical activity class when it is not a requirement for graduation. Table 2 shows the results from the 16 survey statements. For reporting purposes the top half (eight) of the survey statements with the largest student responses will be reported.

Quantitative Analysis

The top reason college students participate in physical activity classes is to have fun (statement 3). For the male students 55.7% strongly agreed, 34.9% agreed. For the female students 44.9% strongly agreed and 42.7% agreed. The second highest responded statement for taking a physical activity class was to get away momentarily from the daily grind (statement 15). For male students 34.0% strongly agreed and 46.0% agreed. For female students 32.4% strongly agreed and 43.8% agreed. The third highest statement college students responded to in regards to their participation in a physical activity class was to get regular exercise (statement 4). For this statement male students responded with 36.6% strongly agreeing and 33.2% agreeing. For the female students 57.3% strongly agreed and 28.6% agreed. The fourth highest answered survey statement dealt with students keeping in good health and physical condition (statement 6). For the male students, 28.5% strongly agreed and 40.9% agreed. Female students reported 42.2% strongly agreeing and 43.8% agreeing. The fifth highest survey statement college students responded to was feel good (statement 11). Male student responses were 17.9% strongly agreeing and 49.4% agreeing. For the female students they responded with 35.1% strongly agreeing and 48.1% agreeing. The sixth highest responded survey

statement dealt with improving skills in the activity class that was being taken (statement 7). Results were very similar for both male (30.2% strongly agreed and 42.1% agreed) and female (30.3% strongly agreed and 43.2% agreed). The seventh highest responded survey statement for college student's participation in physical activity class was to reduce stress (statement 12). For male participants, 21.7% strongly agreed and 44.3% agreed. Female students responded with 33.5% strongly agreeing and 40.5% agreeing. And the eighth highest student survey response was to have regular exercise time. Male responses were 25.1% strongly agreed and 38.3% agreed. Female responses were 37.3% strongly agreed and 38.4% agreed.

Qualitative Analysis

Additional data results were from short-answers for every survey statement the participant answered either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. In keeping with analysis of the quantitative data, the top eight survey statements were analyzed looking for themes throughout each of the eight survey statements. Ordering of responses we be similar to the quantitative results. The highest responded survey statement for taking a physical activity class was to have fun (statement 3). The most common response from students dealing with having fun was "I love the sport." From this study the sport could be basketball, volleyball, bowling, and soccer. Another common response from this survey statement was, "exercise is fun" and "I want a fun class amidst the tough class schedule I have." The second highest statement responded to dealt with getting away momentarily from the daily grind (statement 15). A large number of students stated that attending their physical activity class was "a great break during the day." Other students stated that their class was "a good escape," and that the class helped "reduce their stress." The third highest statement responded by the students dealt with was to get regular exercise (statement 4). A common student response was "this class gives me a consistent schedule to exercise." Also many students stated that taking "this class has forced me to be physically active," and "this class holds me accountable." The fourth highest statement students responded to was to keep in good health and physical condition (statement 6). Student responses for this survey statement were "it allows me to get my daily or regular workout", and "this class is a great way to stay in great condition while having fun." The fifth highest survey statement student's

responded to was to feel good (statement 11). Many students stated, “The endorphins make me feel good,” “it (the class) relieves stress”, and “exercise makes me feel better overall.” The sixth survey statement dealt with improving my skills in this activity (statement 7). A majority of student responses for this statement were, “I wanted to get better,” and “I wanted to learn more.” The seventh highest survey statement for which college students took physical activity class was to relieve stress (statement 12). For this statement many of the students responded by saying, that this class was “a good break from my classes”, and “distractions (the class) help with my stress.” And the eighth highest survey statement students responded to was to have a regular exercise time (statement 16). For this survey statement, student comments were “Easy to fit into my schedule”, “The time is already set aside”, and “The registered class forces me to come at a set time and work out regularly.

Discussion

This study investigated the reasons why college students take physical activity classes when it is not required for graduation from college. Results suggest that college students take non-required physical activity classes for many different reasons. For this reason, the following items are to be discussed.

Students expressed that they took physical activity classes to have fun. Fun is considered one of the most important reasons someone is involved in physical activity, and if it (the activity) is not fun the person will stop participating in the activity (Ewing & Seefeldt, 1988). Garn and Cothran (2006) have stated that the construct of fun is a complex topic consisting of a variety of factors. The same researchers studied fun in the physical education context. In their research they focused on certain factors that affected students fun in physical education class. Two of the factors that affected student's fun in physical education was the task students participated in class and the social element students encountered in class. Student's stated that physical education class was fun because “I felt competent in floor hockey and was on the same level as everyone else.” This illustrates that if students feel good about their skill level, physical activity class will be fun. A second factor that affected physical education class being fun was the social aspect. One student stated, “It was a chance to hang out with friends and play in the

middle of the school day.” The results from this study are similar to this research study. For this study, a student response regarding the task or activity was, “Soccer is one of my favorite sports. I love playing and who I play against.” In regards to the social aspect affecting fun in the physical activity class, students stated, “Basketball is fun, because I am with my friends,” and “I enjoy playing volleyball with my friends.”

Other factors that students' reported in taking physical activity class was that the class gave them a momentary break from their daily grind and that taking the physical activity class helped reduce stress. The results from this part of the study concur with previous research. Barney, Benham and Haslem (2014) studied college student's perceptions of the effects of participation in physical activity courses on stress in their lives. It was found that participation in college physical activity courses helped student cope with their stress, and helped lessen daily stress in their lives. Student responses dealing with getting away momentarily from their daily grind were, “This class reduces my stress,” and “Helps distress me.” Student responses from the reduces stress survey statement were, “When I get done with class, I can handle stress better,” and “Distractions (activity class) helps me with my stress.” Both survey statements asked the college students' different aspects of the participation in their physical activity class. Yet, many of their responses dealt with reducing stress and being able to handle their stress. One last point of discussion deals with college students getting regular exercise in their physical activity class. In a similar study to this study, Weinfeldt and Visek (2009) discovered that one of the reasons college students took physical activity classes, even though it was not required for graduation, was they were able to get regular exercise. For this study many students stated that their physical activity class gives the students' a consistent schedule to get exercise. Also, that the physical activity class forced them to be physically active. Many voiced this opinion in their responses. The word forced was commonly used in many of the student responses. Yet, the tone of how they used the word forced was in a positive light. For example, one student stated, “This class forces me to be physically active. If I didn't do something physical it would drive me crazy with all of my classes.” The findings from this study correlate very closely with the self-determination theory. These students that enroll in the physical activity classes are doing it because they

want to, and that they feel they are competent in their skills. They are autonomous in the fact that they are free to make choices in regards to their learning and education while participating in class activities. And the classes they are enrolled in has some relatedness in that many of them participated in these activities previously to their enrollment in college (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The findings from this study indicate that even though college student's physical activity classes have no impact on graduation requirements, the students find there is value and health benefits that can come from their participation in these classes at this time in their lives.

Implications of this Study

The results from this study are beneficial for those administrators of college physical activity programs and for those that teach college physical activity courses. For the administrators they can plan activity classes that students will like to and benefit in from participating in. For those that teach the college physical activity classes, they should know that those students that take their physical activity classes they are doing it because they want to. Thus, the instructors can plan lessons and activities that students can benefit the most from. Also, the results from this study can be given to those college or university administrators, showing that these physical activities play an important part in the lives of college students. Administrators can continue to or start giving financial support to the physical activity class program. They can also provide gymnasium space and field space, along with providing the equipment for the students in the given activity classes. Probably the greatest implication of this study is that hearing college student voices in regards to why they take physical activity class helps strengthen the literature of the importance physical activity classes are for college students as they work to attain their college education.

Study Limitations

The investigators of this study noted a number of limitations of this study. Foremost was the use of a sample of convenience. Participants were from one university and those participants who participated in this study may not have been representative of other students at other universities that do not require physical activity classes for graduation, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings.

References

- American College of Sports Medicine. (2006). *ACSM's guidelines for exercise testing and prescription* (7th ed.). Baltimore, MD: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Barney, D., Benham, L., & Haslem, L. (2014). Effects of college student's participation in physical activity classes on stress. *American Journal of Health Studies*, 27, 8-11.
- Barney, D., & McGaha, P. (2006). College students' perspective and lifetime participation in basketball and tennis classes. *Journal of the International Council for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance*, XLII, (3), 23-26.
- Cardinal, B.J., Sorensen, S.D., & Cardinal, M.K. (2012). Historical perspective and current status of the physical education graduation requirement at American 4-year colleges and universities. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 83, 503-512.
- Conroy, M.B., Cook, N.R., Manson, J.E., Buring, J.E., & Lee, I. (2005). Past PA, current PA, and risk of coronary heart disease. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, 1251-1256.
- Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 26, 227-268.
- Ewing, M.E., & Seefeldt, V. (1988). *American youth and sports participation*. North Palm Beach, FL: American Footwear Association.
- Garn, A.C., & Cothran, D.J. (2006). The fun factor in physical education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 25, (2), 281-297.
- Glasser, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. New York, NY: Aldine.
- Guay, F., Vallerand, R.J., & Blanchard, C. (2000). One the assessment of situational intrinsic and extrinsic motivation: The situational motivation scale (SIMS). *Motivation and Emotion*, 24, 175-213.

- Kahn, E.B., Ramsey, L.T., Brownson, R.C., et al. (2002). The effectiveness of interventions to increase physical activity, A systematic review. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 22(4s), 73-107.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry* (pp.339-344). Newbury Park: Sage.
- Nicole, M.J.Y., Leenders, W., Sherman, M. & Ward, P. (2003). College physical activity courses: Why do students enroll and what are their health behaviors. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 74, 313-318.
- Pate, R.R., Pratt, M., Blair, S.N., Haskell, W.L., Macera, C.A., Boucard, C., Bushner, D., Ettinger, W., Heath, G.W., & King, A.C. (1995). Physical activity and public health: A recommendation from the centers of disease control and prevention and the American college of sport medicine. *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 273, 402-407.
- Sarvela, P.D., & McDermott, R.J. (1993). *Health Education Evaluation and Measurement: A Practitioner's Perspective*. Madison, WI: WCB Brown & Benchmark.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2000). *Healthy people 2010: National health promotion and disease prevention objectives-PA and fitness*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.
- Weinfeldt, J.A., & Visek, A.J. (2009). Why college students enroll in exercise and sport activity classes: An exploratory investigation. *Missouri Journal of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, 19, (1), 64-76.

Correspondence:

David Barney, Ed.D.
Associate Professor
Brigham Young University
249 G Smith Field House
Provo, Utah 84602
Phone: (801) 422-6477
Fax: (801) 422- 0930
Email: David_Barney@byu.edu

Kelsey Higginson, M.A.
Graduate Student
Brigham Young University
249F Smith Fieldhouse
Provo, Utah 84602
Phone: (385) 375-1569
Email: kelseyhigg@gmail.com

Table 1. Why Take College Activity Classes Survey.

The following survey questions will ask you why you take a STAC class. The survey questions will ask you to circle your answer (SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, & NA=Not Applicable). If you answer with a SA or A you will be asked to further explain. Thank you for your help in taking this survey.

I took this STAC class...

1. to learn a new activity
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

2. to have fun
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

3. to meet new people.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

4. to get regular exercise.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

5. to improve my self-confidence.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

6. to keep in good health and physical condition.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

7. to improve my skills in this activity.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

8. to learn skills to use after this class.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

9. to be with friends.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

10. to improve my physical appearance.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

11. to feel good.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

12. to reduce stress.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

Table 1 cont.

Why Take College Activity Classes Survey

13. to improve my fitness.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

14. to lose weight.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

15. to get away momentarily from the daily grind.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

16. to have a regular exercise time.
SA A NA D SD

If you positively answered SA or A for this statement, could you explain your thoughts for taking this STAC class.

Year in School:	Fr	Soph	Jr	Sr	Grad Student
Gender:	Male	Female			
Class Activity (ex. basketball, volleyball, tennis, etc):	_____				

Table 2. Results Regarding Why College Students Take Physical Activity Classes when not required for Graduation.

	SA N (%)	A N (%)	NA N (%)	D N (%)	SD N (%)
1. Learn A New Skill					
Male	19 (8.1)	60 (25.5)	44 (18.7)	72 (30.6)	40 (17.0)
Female	31 (16.8)	72 (38.9)	34 (18.4)	39 (21.1)	9 (4.9)
2. Have Fun					
Male	131 (55.7)	82 (34.9)	13 (5.5)	9 (3.8)	0 (0)
Female	83 (44.9)	79 (42.7)	14 (7.6)	7 (3.8)	2 (1.1)
3. Meet New People					
Male	12 (5.1)	39 (16.6)	70 (29.8)	85 (36.2)	29 (12.3)
Female	14 (7.6)	39 (21.1)	63 (34.1)	55 (29.7)	14 (7.6)
4. Get Regular Exercise					
Male	86 (36.6)	78 (28.6)	29 (12.3)	35 (14.9)	7 (3.0)
Female	106 (57.3)	53 (28.6)	10 (5.4)	13 (7.0)	3 (1.6)
5. Improve my Self-Confidence					
Male	9 (3.8)	39 (16.6)	81 (34.5)	80 (34.0)	26 (11.1)
Female	13 (7.0)	54 (29.2)	75 (40.5)	39 (21.1)	4 (2.2)
6. Keep in Good Health & Physical Condition					
Male	67 (28.5)	96 (40.9)	32 (13.6)	35 (14.9)	5 (2.1)
Female	78 (42.2)	81 (43.8)	14 (11.0)	9 (4.9)	3 (1.6)
7. Improve my Skills in this Activity					
Male	71 (30.2)	99 (42.1)	37 (15.7)	24 (10.2)	4 (1.7)
Female	56 (30.3)	80 (43.2)	33 (17.8)	15 (8.1)	1 (0.5)
8. Learn Skills to use after this Class					
Male	33 (14.0)	78 (33.2)	58 (24.7)	53 (22.6)	13 (5.5)
Female	39 (21.1)	79 (42.7)	47 (25.4)	20 (10.8)	0 (0)
9. Be with Friends					
Male	20 (8.5)	37 (15.7)	81 (34.5)	78 (33.2)	19 (8.1)
Female	17 (9.2)	28 (15.1)	75 (40.5)	50 (27.0)	15 (8.1)
10. Improve my Physical Appearance					
Male	13 (5.5)	52 (22.1)	77 (32.8)	77 (32.8)	16 (6.8)
Female	29 (15.7)	59 (31.9)	46 (24.9)	38 (20.5)	13 (7.0)
11. Feel Good					
Male	42 (17.9)	116 (49.4)	47 (20.0)	28 (11.9)	2 (0.9)
Female	65 (35.1)	89 (48.1)	19 (10.3)	12 (6.5)	0 (0)
12. Reduce Stress					
Male	51 (21.7)	104 (44.3)	44 (18.7)	31 (13.2)	5 (2.1)
Female	62 (33.5)	75 (40.5)	32 (17.3)	16 (8.6)	0 (0)
13. Improve My Fitness					
Male	40 (17.0)	98 (41.7)	58 (24.7)	35 (14.9)	4 (1.7)
Female	49 (26.5)	86 (46.5)	31 (16.8)	13 (7.0)	6 (3.2)
14. Lose Weight					
Male	10 (4.3)	20 (8.5)	54 (23.0)	103 (43.8)	48 (20.4)
Female	18 (9.7)	31 (16.8)	63 (34.1)	50 (27.0)	23 (12.4)
15. Get Away Momentarily from the Daily Grind					
Male	80 (34.0)	46 (43.8)	24 (10.2)	20 (8.5)	3 (1.3)
Female	60 (32.4)	81 (43.8)	25 (13.5)	17 (9.2)	2 (1.1)
16. Have a Regular Exercise Time					
Male	59 (25.1)	90 (38.3)	41 (17.4)	37 (15.7)	8 (3.4)
Female	69 (37.3)	71 (38.4)	22 (11.9)	19 (10.3)	4 (2.2)