

# Rationale for Independent Administration of Collegiate Recreational Sports Programs

## A Position Paper

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There are significant differences between recreational sports programs, physical education departments and intercollegiate athletic programs. The mission statement, goals and objectives of these programs create distinctions between them in the populations served, as well as the overall contributions each makes to the college or university. More specifically, the nature of the populations served, the characteristics of the program offered, and the importance of such programs will be identified. The purpose of this paper is to outline the differences between the programs and offer a rationale for different management strategies requiring independent administration for each.

In a NIRSA Survey of Institutional members in 1992, Recreational Sports Departments showed the following administrative reporting structures: 61% Student Affairs; 18% Athletics; 16% Academic; 4% Other; and 1% Associated Students. While the common element of recreational sports, physical education and intercollegiate athletics is sport and exercise, this commonality, in and of itself, should not serve as a basis for a single administrative unit overseeing all programs. These objectives can best be reached in a structure where one program is not subservient or indistinguishable from the others, but each is assisted in fulfilling its goals and mission.

### **Mission**

The mission of recreational sports is to provide a broad program of sports and fitness activities for both men and women of *all* ability levels in order to enhance their academic productivity, personal effectiveness, and commitment to their quality of life in the campus community. Included within this mission is encouraging the development of students as individuals and team members, as leaders and followers, and as competitors and collaborators. Faculty and staff also gain from their own participation that improves campus community interaction. Specific benefits include: enhanced educational outcomes, heightened sense of accomplishment, improved health, higher esteem, stress release, social interaction, and lifetime physical benefits.



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Physical education's mission is twofold. With respect to academic majors in the field, the mission focuses on the professional preparation of teachers, coaches and researchers. Students participate in a prescribed curriculum where biomechanics, exercise physiology, pedagogy, sports medicine, and kinesiology are stressed. Another aspect of the mission for physical education focuses on fitness and physical activity. Students have the opportunity to learn sports skills and concepts for fitness and for academic credit.

The primary mission for intercollegiate athletics is to field athletic teams and individuals who can be highly competitive at the conference, state, regional and/or national level as a part of a well-balanced, broad-based program reflective of the educational objectives of the college or university.

In addition, the mission is to create an environment where athletes can successfully integrate academic, athletic and social activities by operating in a program with a comprehensive system of academic services, quality coaching, and adequate facilities.

### **Program Comparisons**

Recreational sports encourages and enables participation for all individuals, including accommodations for people with disabilities. Individuals are welcome to participate in a variety of activities, regardless of skill level. Recreational sports also makes a concerted effort to recognize and meet the needs of diverse populations. A history of encouraging women to participate is well-established, and in fact, recreational sports often adapts rules to enhance women's participation. Recreational sports rules foster flexibility and creativity to meet local campus needs. Rules, facilities and equipment can all be modified to accommodate participant interest and local constraints. Student leadership development, appreciation of differences, group development, self-discipline, conflict-resolution skills, and safety awareness are stressed as individual student responsibilities in the operation of recreational sports programs and serve as measures of program success.

Physical education programs have similar educational objectives to recreational sports, but stress the cognitive elements of sports and fitness activities. The focus is academic preparation of majors in the field. While activity classes do foster participation, most emphasize skill acquisition for the purpose of learning to teach the activity.

Competition is often regulated by the instructor and groups are not initiated independently by the students. Students are in the subordinate role of the learner under a professional educator and are not generally included in leadership capacities.

While this is necessary to achieve predetermined learning outcomes, it offers minimal opportunity for peer-to-peer direction. The primary measure of success in physical education classes are grades based on class criteria assigned by the instructor.

Intercollegiate athletics limits participation to only the most highly skilled competitors and promotes specialization in a particular sport. The issue of gender equity in intercollegiate

athletics continues to be an area of concern, requiring special attention to ensure it is achieved and then maintained. Competition is governed by an extensive set of academic and eligibility rules. Athletics directs energy to bringing a small number of students to campus to pursue college sports careers by relying on professionals as coaches, trainers, advisors, managers, maintenance staff, ticket managers, and media coordinators to execute all the management functions. Success is measured primarily by competitive athletic record.

### **Staff Selection**

Staffing selection for each of the programs is based on educational and administrative preparation. There are curricula, certifications, management schools, professional associations, state, regional and national meetings, and the development of activities specific to each profession. Recreational sports focuses on individuals who possess a strong service orientation and respect for individuals of all skill levels.

Physical education faculty are selected for skills in teaching, research accomplishments, and publications. Intercollegiate athletic programs select coaches on competitive athletic record and division-level experiences.

### **Funding**

The priority on expenditure of funds in recreational sports is on providing opportunity. Direct service to the students and campus community is the main objective. In some cases, recreational sports departments even generate income. Recreational sports programs are extremely cost effective because students help provide services. In physical education, academic expenditures are driven by the student credit hours generated and fixed personnel costs. Faculty and staff do not participate in classes. Athletic programs tend to be more costly because of the professional staff and support services provided. There are expenses for recruiting, compliance, academic assistance, sports information, travel, lodging, and scholarships. While many athletic programs generate income, this is limited to one or two sports, and the money is then used to subsidize all the sports that do not generate income.

### **Facilities**

Maximum participation and the equitable distribution of limited facility resources is the guiding factor in facility scheduling for recreational sports. Activity is encouraged with broad participation as the ultimate goal. Physical education classes are scheduled as part of the normal curriculum and facilities are often shared. Intercollegiate use of facilities is devoted to use by a few individuals for extensive periods of time.

While joint use is commonly practiced at many institutions, priority in scheduling puts physical education and intercollegiate athletics requests ahead of recreational sports. The time available to recreation must be shared among the different areas (i.e. intramurals, sport clubs, informal recreation). Rarely is there enough time left over for all students to find space for their regular activity needs.

## **Community Benefits**

Recreational sports directly serve the entire campus community. Competitive successes are recognized, but stress is placed on participation rather than winning. All participants are viewed as winners by measuring success in terms of increased satisfaction with education and a better quality of life. Active students, on average, are happier and healthier while pursuing their academic program. A positive overall experience has been shown to facilitate the development of a more supportive alumnus as a taxpayer and donor in subsequent years.

Physical education activity classes are usually available to a cross section of students. However, the original intent to ensure well-rounded, physically fit students, an intent that fostered the growth and development of physical education programs, has been shifted to recreational sports programs. Currently, the primary goal of many physical education programs is academically oriented and concentrates on the instruction and training of majors in the field. Benefit to the community is offered after students graduate in the form of teachers and coaches.

Intercollegiate athletics provides benefits in the form of camaraderie and school pride, but the focus is on serving external publics, especially the media and sports organizations (i.e. the NCAA, the NAIA, and the NJCAA). Benefits to the campus community are more indirect. Participation, except for a small number of top athletes, is passive in nature and based on event spectating.

## **Conclusion**

Recreational sports provide the bulk of benefits directly to the members of the campus community and enhance the quality of life for a large percentage of the campus community. Physical education provides academic instruction as its primary goal, offering skills instruction as a secondary aspect; both aspects reach a small segment of the campus as a whole. Intercollegiate athletics provides participation to the campus community in a more indirect fashion.

It is clear that attention must be given to the inherent differences between recreational sports, physical education and intercollegiate athletics when making decisions concerning the administrative structure for operating these programs. The unique and often dichotomous nature of each program's mission deserves special attention from the chief administrative officers when reporting structures are being organized and/or reorganized. Separate but equal organizational structures appear to be in order. Autonomy in matters of budget, facilities and personnel will allow objectives to be obtained and enhance the effectiveness for each program.