

NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation

# The Benefits of Campus Recreation

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# FOREWORD

NIRSA has long been a champion of the many benefits gained by students who participate in campus recreation. With support from the NIRSA Foundation and as part of the Association's budding Value of Collegiate Recreation Initiative, NIRSA commissioned Dr. Scott Forrester to analyze and interpret the responses of over 33,500 students who participated in the NIRSA/NASPA Consortium Nationwide Survey.

His expansive review of that data set, highlighted in *The Benefits of Campus Recreation* report, shows that current and prospective students value campus recreation facilities and programs. It shows that students are taking advantage of facilities and programs—and that those who do so more frequently and more diversely experience additional benefits. Moreover, it shows that participation during these formative years positively influences students' attitudes toward maintaining a healthy lifestyle. These findings affirm that the overwhelming majority of students report skills development and attribute health and wellness benefits to their participation in campus recreation facilities, programs, or services.

Dr. Forrester's *The Benefits of Campus Recreation* was made possible by the generous support of NIRSA Foundation donors, and it is the second installment in NIRSA's Value of Collegiate Recreation Initiative. This initiative offers members a series of projects and reports that **provide credible evidence of the impact of collegiate recreation on student recruitment, retention, health and wellbeing, as well as student learning outcomes and post-graduation employment success.**

Whether you are coming to this report as a student or recreational sports professional who serves a campus population, a college or university administrator, employer, parent, or prospective student, we hope it provides you with new and useful insights into how beneficial collegiate recreation is for students.

# INTRODUCTION

For years the field of collegiate recreation has championed the benefits of participation in campus recreational sports activities, facilities, programs, and services. While there was a time that the evidence to support these claims were often anecdotal or rooted in the general experiences of practitioners there is a growing body of literature that is increasingly substantiating these claims and providing credible evidence documenting the value of campus recreational sports on college and university campuses. Students who participate in recreational sports opportunities have increased retention rates and improved health and wellness. Students who participate often and in a range of opportunities benefit even more.

This specific study, reporting the results from the Recreation and Wellness Benchmark/Survey used as part of the 2013 NASPA Assessment and Knowledge Consortium, represents the most comprehensive effort to date substantiating the impact of participation in campus recreational sports, activities, facilities, programs and services on student recruitment and retention, and various health and wellness as well as student learning outcomes. The NASPA Assessment and Knowledge Consortium is a collection of assessment instruments focused on key areas within Student Affairs.

Over 33,500 students from 38 different colleges and universities across the United States participated in this study. When taking into account the approximate student population of all 38 colleges/universities combined in this study (almost 580,000 students), we can be 99% confident that the sampling error associated with the results of this study is less than 1% - thereby providing some very credible, accurate, and compelling results.

This report highlights many of the key findings from this analysis in the areas of: participation, student recruitment and retention, health and wellness and student learning outcomes, and student employment in campus recreation. While some of these findings may largely confirm what NIRSA members already know – having credible, tangible, and citable data will help campus recreational sport professionals advocate and demonstrate the value of campus recreational sports on their respective campuses. Funding for this project was provided by the NIRSA Foundation.



# CAMPUS RECREATIONAL SPORTS PARTICIPATION PATTERNS

A blue-tinted photograph of a large group of people participating in a recreational sports event on a gymnasium floor. The participants are engaged in various activities, some appearing to be playing a game like basketball or volleyball. In the background, a banner for Cincinnati Children's is visible, along with other people and equipment. The overall scene is active and social.

Campus recreational sport participation patterns include students that use on-campus recreation center facilities, programs, and services. Participation information can be created by segmenting students based on how frequently they utilize campus recreation facilities, programs, and services.



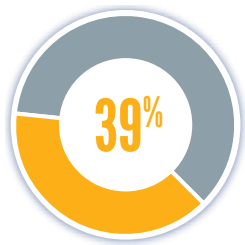
**Usage:** 75% of students use on-campus recreation center facilities, programs, and services.



**Frequency:** Of those participants, 80% participate in campus recreation programs and/or activities at least once/week.

# Frequency of Participation for Students Who Utilize Campus Recreation Facilities, Programs, and Services

## Per-week Usage



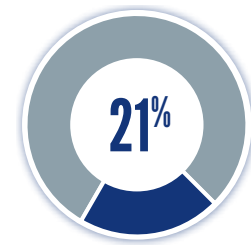
39% of respondents indicated they participated 3 times per week or more.



56% of respondents indicated they participated 2 times per week or more.



79% of respondents indicated they participated at least 1 time per week.



21% of students indicated they never participate.



Per-Visit Usage



- 11% spend less than 30 minutes per visit.
- 47% spend 30-59 minutes per visit.
- 31% spend 60-89 minutes per visit.
- 11% spend 90 minutes or longer per visit.
- *Almost 90% of students indicated that they spend at least 30 minutes per visit!*

# Participation in Campus Recreation Programs & Activities

For students who indicated they utilized the campus recreation facilities, programs, or services, they were also asked how often they participate in a variety of campus recreation activities. Responses ranged from “Never,” “1-2 times/semester,” “1-2 times/month,” “1-2 times/week,” “3-4 times/week,” and “5 or more times/week” and are presented in the following table.

Campus Recreational Sport Activity	Never	1-2 times per semester	1-2 times per month	1-2 times per week	3-4 times per week	5 or more times per week
Cardio-vascular training (e.g., treadmill, elliptical, stationary bike)	17.0	9.0	12.4	24.8	24.5	12.2
Weight training/lifting free weights	30.5	9.7	11.3	20.4	18.3	9.7
Open recreation (e.g., pick-up basketball, volleyball, soccer)	53.6	13.9	12.1	11.9	5.8	2.7
Instructor-led group fitness or exercise classes	57.9	14.5	9.3	12.1	4.9	1.4
Aquatics/pool	61.6	17.7	9.8	6.9	2.7	1.4
Intramural sports	65.5	13.2	6.0	11.9	2.5	0.9
Racquet sports	67.8	14.8	8.6	5.5	2.2	1.1
Outdoor adventure activities and/or trips	75.1	12.3	5.7	3.7	1.9	1.2
Wellness programs (e.g., wellness classes, wellness expo)	77.8	12.2	4.5	3.1	1.4	1.0
Sport clubs	80.6	5.3	2.7	5.1	3.8	2.5
Classes (e.g., safety, non-credit, for credit)	81.2	9.6	2.9	3.7	1.6	1.0
Personal training	83.8	4.4	2.9	3.9	3.1	1.9
Fitness assessments or testing	85.4	7.8	3.0	1.9	1.0	0.8

Students participated most frequently in:



- Cardio-vascular training (e.g., treadmill, elliptical, stationary bike)



- Weight training/lifting free weights



- Open recreation (e.g., pick-up basketball, volleyball, soccer)

Students participated least frequently in:

- Classes (safety, non-credit, for credit)

- Personal training

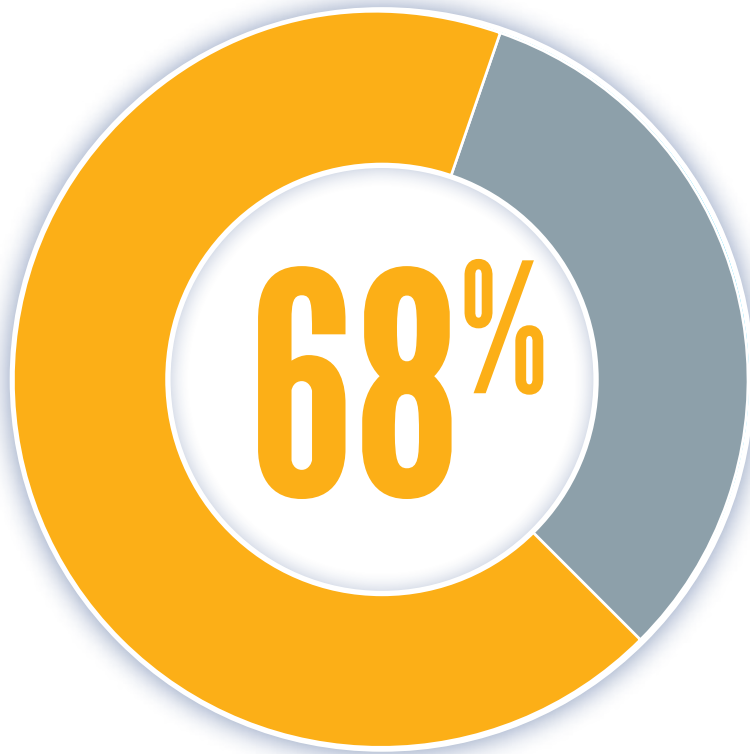
- Fitness assessments or testing

# STUDENT RECRUITMENT



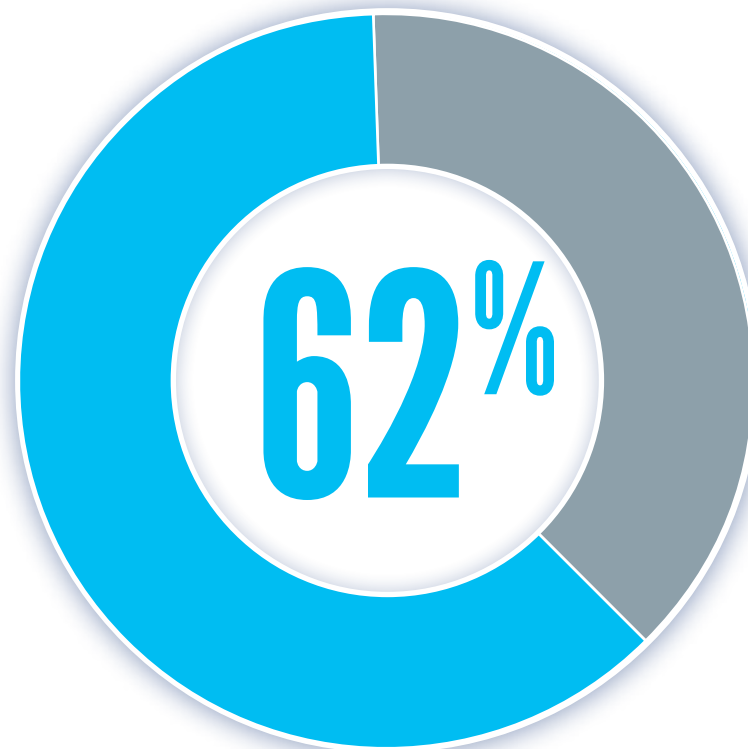


Campus recreation facilities and programs continue to be a factor for students when deciding what college/university to attend.



◀ **Influence from Facilities:** 68% of students report that campus recreation **facilities** influenced their decision of which college/university to attend.

▼ **Influence from Programs:** 62% of students report that campus recreation **programs** influenced their decision of which college/university to attend.



# STUDENT RETENTION

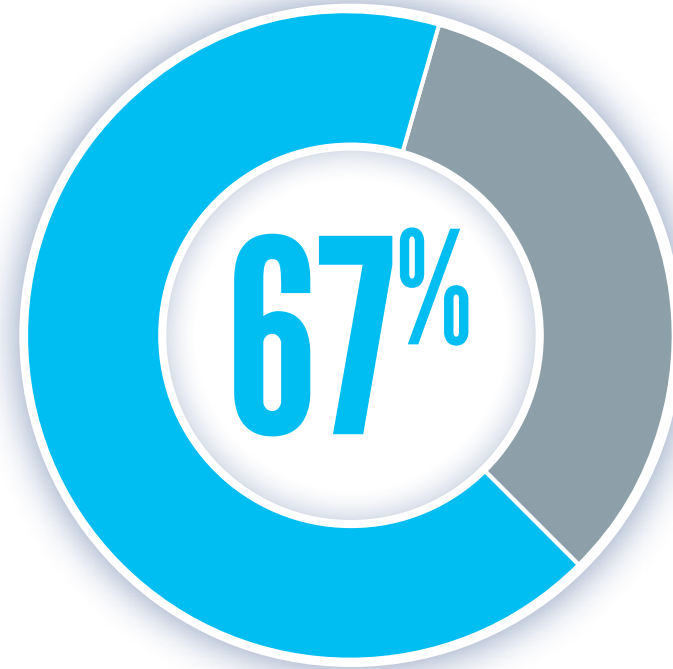


Campus recreation facilities and programs continue to be an even greater factor for students as well as the contribution of recreation center activities and programs to the quality of life at their institution when deciding to continue at their college/university.



**Influence from Facilities:**

74% of students report that campus recreation **facilities** influenced their decisions to continue attending their chosen college/university.



**Influence from Programs:**

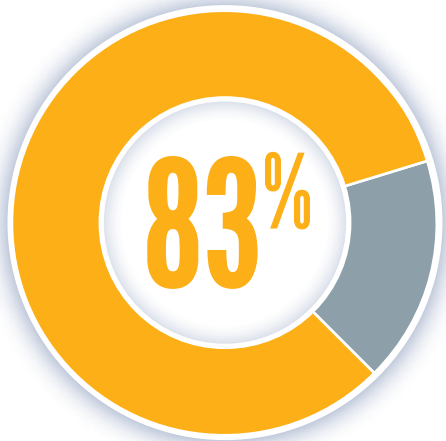
67% of students report that campus recreation **programs** influenced their decisions to continue attending their chosen college/university.



# HEALTH & WELLNESS OUTCOMES

Campus recreation programs have an impact on various health and wellness outcomes. Recreation, sports and/or fitness activities are important to students prior to enrollment at a college/university and also after graduating from a college/university. Additionally, maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important to students both prior to their enrollment and also after they leave college/university. Participating in recreation activities and programs expands interest in staying fit and healthy.

# Importance of Recreation, Sports, and/or Fitness Activities



**Activity Before College:** Prior to enrolling in their chosen college/university, 83% of students report that campus recreation, sports, and/or fitness activities were important to them.



**Activity During College:** 75% of students report at some level that participating in recreation activities and programs has expanded their interest in staying fit and healthy.



**Activity Beyond College:** 90% of students report that campus recreation, sports, and/or fitness activities will be important for them to be healthy after graduating from their chosen college/university.



# Importance of Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle



**Healthy Lifestyle Before College:** 94% of students report that maintaining a healthy lifestyle was important to them **prior** to enrolling in their chosen college/university.



**Healthy Lifestyle Beyond College:** 98% of students report that maintaining a healthy lifestyle will be important to them **after** graduating from their chosen college/university.

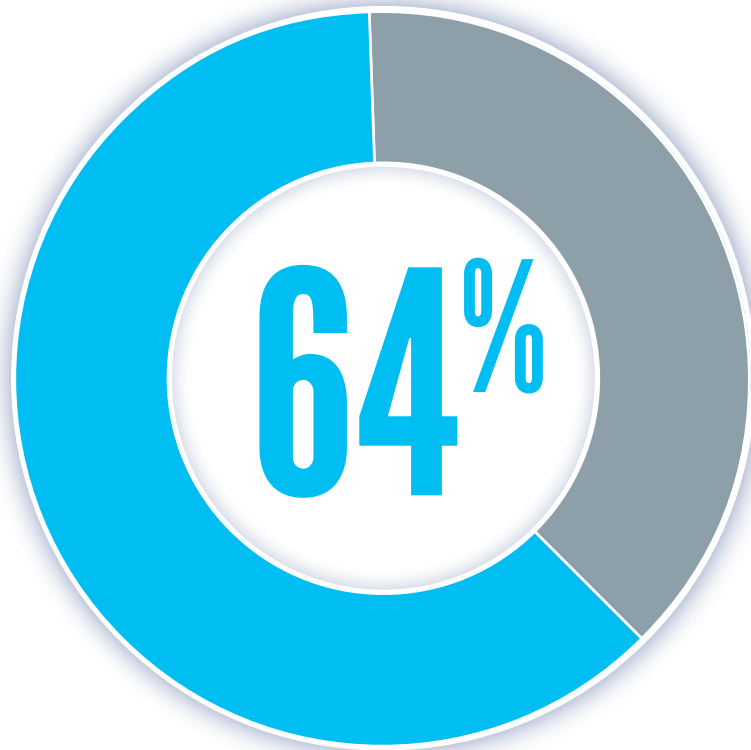
**The top health and wellness benefits students attributed to their participation in campus recreation facilities and programs:**

1. Feeling of wellbeing (91%)
2. Overall health (91%)
3. Fitness level (90%)
4. Physical strength (89%)
5. Stress management (86%)
6. Athletic ability (85%)
7. Weight control (84%)
8. Self-confidence (83%)
9. Balance/coordination (80%)
10. Concentration (75%)

# STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES



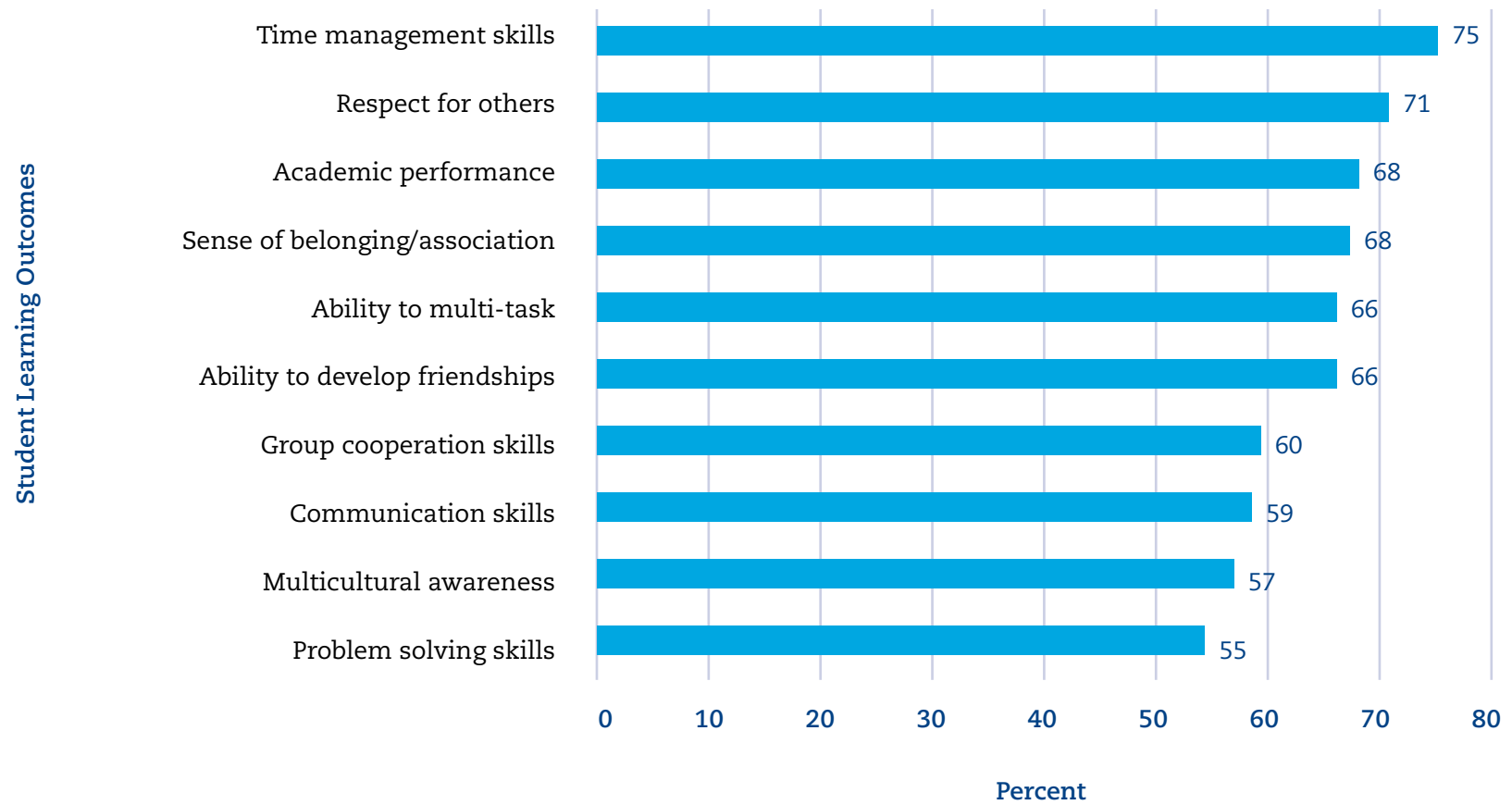
Campus recreation programs have an impact on various student learning outcomes that include providing them with skills/abilities they will use after college as well as whether or not students feel they increased or improved in a number of learning outcome areas from their participation in recreation.



**Student Learning Outcomes:**

64% of students report that increased participation in campus recreation has provided them with skills/abilities that will be used after college.

Students that participate in campus recreation facilities, programs, or services report the following increase in soft skills:





# ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF CAMPUS RECREATION PARTICIPATION



Students were asked, ***“In what other ways has your participation in campus recreation activities, programs, and services helped or enhanced your experience at this college/university?”*** Over 6,700 students responded to this question.

**The top 5 responses were:**

- Meeting new people and forming relationships
- Relieving stress
- Physical fitness
- Improved health by weight loss and control
- Fun and enjoyment

