An Assessment of the Factors that Influence the Promotion and Delivery of Sport, Fitness, and Health Courses: Contributions of Marketing to Physical Education

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Abstract

The factors that influence students' enrollment in sport, fitness, and health courses, and their evaluation of the quality of service they receive continues to be of interest. A case study exposed a variety of factors influencing the promotion and delivery of sport, fitness, and health courses. While most of the factors identified were only minimally influential, the most prominent reasons for enrolling in sport, fitness, and health courses were related to skill development or enhancement of knowledge about health and fitness. The "performance of the instructor" received the highest rating relating to course delivery quality, and "improvement in fitness" received the lowest rating. Significant differences were also found between the students' rating of the quality of the sport, fitness, and health courses. Based on the findings, marketing suggestions to improve the overall promotion and delivery of the program were presented.

College and university physical educators have the responsibility to encourage healthy and active lifestyles among their students. Therefore, it is important to examine the effectiveness of physical education classes that are offered to meet this responsibility. To do so requires an assessment of the various factors that influence the overall promotion and delivery of such course offerings.

A case study of a physical activities program was assessed at a large mid-western university located in a community with a wealth of sport, fitness, and health offerings for residents and students alike. Although the university offered a very comprehensive physical activities program for students, it was still in competition with organizations offering similar programs and services in its immediate environment. There were no general physical education or health requirements for students enrolled at the university; however, a series of laboratory and theory courses focused on physical activity and health behavior were offered as electives for undergraduate credit through the university's Sport, Fitness and Health Program (SFHP). The SFHP was designated as a scholarly program of the School in which it was housed. Each quarter, students were offered the oppomnity to take approximately 60 different courses in individual sports, fitness activities, court sports, games, martial arts, dance, first aid/CPR, and aquatics. The mission of the SFHP was to enhance the health and quality of life of students through the promotion of an active and healthy lifestyle. The mission statement reads:

"Consistent with the academic thrust of the School, the mission of the SFHP is to enhance the health and quality of life of our students through the promotion of an active lifestyle. The SFHP is a manifestation of our social responsibility to offer a program of services to educate and train students about: (a) the physiological and psychosocial benefits of sport and physical activity; (b) the dynamics and interplay of physical activity, fitness, health, and quality of life; and (c) the psychomotor skills related to sport, exercise, and leisure; and (d) the cognitive and behavioral skills necessary to maintain a healthy lifestyle. By promoting these services and providing opportunities for students to engage physical activity, it is the intent of the SFHP to induce behavior changes among students which have an enduring effect on maintaining health through physical activity and a healthy lifestyle. The program's services will be made equally available and accessible to all students."

To identify means of enhancing the promotion and delivery of the SFHP, the primary objectives of this study were to: (a) describe the demographic profile of students enrolled in SFHP courses, (b) determine students' frequency of enrollment in the courses, (c) assess the reasons students enroll in SFHP courses, and (d) ascertain students' evaluation of the quality of the courses/overall SFHP.

Methodology

Sample

The population included 3,307 students (95% undergraduate and 5% graduate) who were enrolled in the SFHP courses. Courses such as golf, basketball, volleyball, racquetball, bowling, table tennis, and other sport-related courses were classified as sport. Courses such as weight training, aerobics, jogging, and fitness-oriented courses were classified as fitness. Courses such as first aid, CPR,, health, diet and exercise, alcohol and drugs, and other health behavior related courses were classified as health courses. Courses excluded from this analysis because they were not in session during the data collection period were tennis and outdoor pursuit courses. Thus, a convenient cluster sampling technique was employed.

Instrument

A questionnaire based on the SFHP program goals was developed and analyzed for face validity, content validity, construct validity, readability, and relevance by a panel of experts (comprised of the School's faculty). Based on the faculty's responses, the questionnaire was perceived to be a valid instrument to use in this descriptive and exploratory investigation. The first section of the questionnaire contained 15 items to identify the factors that influenced enrollment in the SFHP. The items posited to impact enrollment in the SFHP courses were: "to participate in regularly scheduled exercise/ activity"; "to socialize and meet new people"; "to fulfill an elective course requirement in my major"; "to fulfill an elective course requirement in my minor"; "to improve my current skill level"; "to learn a new skill/activity"; "to enhance my overall health and fitness"; "to continue participating in an activity/sport in which I participated during high school"; "to receive an easy A/A-"; "to have a course with this instructor"; "to learn the history and basic fundamentals of this course"; "to learn about health/fitness issues"; "to develop and improve my health and fitness"; "to develop confidence in my ability to participate in this activity"; and "to adopt healthier leisure habits". Students were asked to rate each factor using a 7-point Likert-type scale with values ranging from 1 to 7 (with 1 indicating that the factor was "not at all influential", and 7 indicating that the factor was "very influential"). The reliability coefficient for

the 15 items received a Cronbach alpha rating of.76, indicating statistically acceptable levels of internal consistency.

The second section of the questionnaire included 6 items in which the students assessed the quality of a number of items relating to the delivery of the course. The factors listed included: "my instructor"; "the degree to which the course objectives were met"; "the course content"; "the course organization"; and "my improvement in fitness". The students were asked to rate the quality of each factor using a scale with values ranging from 1 to 7 (1 = poor; 2 = fair; 3 = below average; 4 average; 5 above average; 6 = good; and 7 = excellent). The reliability coefficients for these 6 items received a Cronbach alpha of.84, indicating a statistically acceptable level of internal consistency. Also ascertained in the questionnaire was the frequency of enrollment in the SFHP. Lastly, various items were included in the questionnaire to identify the demographic characteristics of the students (such as racial/ethnic background, gender, age, and whether the student was a person with a disability).

Data Collection Procedures

Enrollment information (i.e., number of students) for SFHP courses was obtained from the program manager of the School in the third week of the quarter. Afterwards, questionnaires, informed consent forms, and computerized answer sheets were distributed to instructors. Instructors were allotted one week to distribute, collect, and return the questionnaires from each of their classes. Several instructors were allotted additional time to distribute and collect the data due to some inconveniences regarding class schedules.

Results

Demographic Profile

A total of 3,307 surveys were distributed of which 2,181 were returned (yielding a 66% response rate). The demographic composition of the students enrolled in the SFHP was: 74% White/Caucasian, 20.5% Black/African, 2.5% Latina/Latino, 2% American Indian, and 1% Asian. Students were asked to provide their gender, yet approximately 17% did not respond to this item on the questionnaire. Of those who did respond, approximately 40% were male and approximately 43% were female. Approximately 23% of the respondents did not indicate their school classification. However, of those that did provide their class rank 13% were freshmen, 24% were sophomores, 21% were juniors, 27% were seniors, and 14% were graduate and professional students. The ages of the students varied; however, approximately 75% of them were between 19-23, followed by 17% of them between 24-29, with the remaining 8% scattered throughout different age ranges. Only 11(0.5%) of the students reported a disability. These findings revealed that the SFHP had a more racially/ethnically diverse population than did the university. See Table 1 for a comparison of the SFHP sample and university student populations.

Frequency of Enrollment

Students were asked if their current enrollment was their initial SFHP course at the university. Ninety-nine percent of the respondents reported that they had taken an SFHP course prior to the one they were enrolled in. Approximately 87.2% of the students had taken one prior course, 12.6% had taken two or three prior courses, and 0.2% bad taken four or more previous courses. Also, 0.3% of the students were concurrently enrolled in other SFHP courses during the quarter.

Influences on Students' Course Enrollment Decisions

The findings on factors influencing students' decisions to enroll in the SFHP courses revealed that most of the factors were only slightly influential. None of them received mean ratings of 6 or 7, which would have indicated that the factors were "influential". Nonetheless, the results

Table 1

Demographic Comparison of Percentage of Students Enrolled in the SFHP and the University.

Racial/Ethnic Identification	University Enrollment*	SFHP Enrollment*
White/Caucasian	84%	74%
Black/African	8%	21%
Asian/Pacific Islander	6%	1%
Latina/Latino	2%	3%
Native American/Indian	0.4%	2%

* The percentages may not equal 100 due to the rounding of the values.

revealed that the major reasons students enrolled in the SFHP program were for skill development or enhancement of knowledge about health and fitness.

The nature of the courses (i.e., sport, fitness, or health), may have had differing effects on the factors that influence students' enrollment in the respective sport, fitness, or health courses. Therefore, grouping the findings into one large pool may not be an accurate reflection of the unique nature of each course. As such, an ANOVA was performed to further ascertain any statistically significant differences based on the nature of the courses. To ascertain where the differences occurred, a Tukey post hoc test was performed. The findings revealed that most of the factors identified were not (or only minimally) influential in the respondents' enrollment decision, as indicated by the low and "neutral" mean scores. However, significant differences were found on the manner in which the factors had differing effects on the enrollment in the various courses. Relative to the focus of each course, enrollment in the sport courses was related to skill development and enrollment in the fitness courses was related to enhancing overall health and fitness. The respondents' decision to enroll in the health courses were not significantly influenced by any of the factors identified; however, their desire to learn about health issues did have a practical effect on their decision. Table 2 provides the mean ratings of the factors' influence on enrollment in the sport, fitness, and health courses. Table 3 lists the factors that were most influential regarding enrollment in each type of course.

Table 2

Mean Rating of the Factors' Influence on Enrollment in the Sport, Fitness, and Health Courses

Factor	Sport Mean (SD)	Fitness Mean (SD)	Health Mean (SD)
1) To learn a new skill/activity.	5.15 (2.14)*	5.42 (1.98)*	4.30 (2.33)*
2) To improve my current skill level.	5.30 (1.99)*	4.79 (2.14)*	4.44 (2.31)*
3) To develop confidence in my ability to participate in this activity.	5.19 (1.94)	4.99 (1.99)	3.86 (2.43)*
4) To enhance my overall health & fitness.	4.22 (2.10)*	5.77 (1.63)*	3.85 (2.29)*
5) To participate in regularly scheduled exercise/activity.	4.86 (2.09)*	5.65 (1.78)*	2.54 (2.04)*
6) To develop and improve my health and fitness.	3.85 (2.23)	5.63 (1.77)*	4.00 (2.32)
7) To adopt healthier leisure habits.	3.79 (2.13)	4.81 (2.10)*	4.06 (2.38)
8) To learn the history and basic fundamentals of this course/activity.	3.68 (2.25)	3.85 (2.29)	4.69 (2.24)*
9) To receive an easy A/A-.	3.77 (2.42)	3.36 (2.27)*	3.79 (2.31)
10) To learn about health/fitness issues.	2.47 (1.85)*	3.70 (2.15)*	4.87 (2.11)*
11) To socialize and meet new people.	3.70 (2.00)*	3.07 (1.94)*	2.50 (1.92)*
12) To continue participating in an activity or sport in which I participated in during high school.	2.34 (2.12)	2.22 (2.00)	1.91 (1.72)*

Table 2 Continued

Mean Differences Between the Factors' Influence on Enrollment in Sport, Fitness, and Health Courses

Factor	Sport Mean (SD)	Fitness Mean (SD)	Health Mean (SD)
13) To fulfill a requirement in my major.	1.75 (1.73)	1.75 (1.76)	3.30 (2.64)*
14) To have a course with this instructor.	2.01 (1.82)	1.72 (1.48)*	1.96 (1.77)
15) To fulfill a requirement in my minor.	1.40 (1.20)	1.35 (1.10)	1.96 (1.81)*

* Asterisks indicate statistically significant differences in the mean score (all are at the .01 level) as indicated by a Tukey post hoc test.

Table 3

Top Factors Influencing Enrollment in Sport, Fitness, and Health Courses

Sport Courses	Fitness Courses	Health Courses*
1. To improve current skill level.	1. To enhance my overall health and fitness.	1. To learn about health/fitness.*
2. To develop confidence to participate in the activity.	2. To participate regularly in scheduled exercise/activity.	
3. To learn a new skill/activity.	3. To develop and improve my health and fitness.	

* None of the factors identified were "influential". Nonetheless, the factor presented received the highest mean rating.

Students' Evaluation of Quality of Service

Students perceived the overall delivery of the SFHP courses to be of good/above average quality. The "performance of the instructor" received the highest rating (M=6.16; SD= 1.27), while their "improvement in fitness" received the lowest rating (M=4.52; SD=1.78). Since students could have rated the quality of each course differently based on the nature of the course, subsequent analysis was performed using an ANOVA to ascertain any significant differences in the manner in which students rated the factors that influenced the quality of the courses based on whether the course was of a sport, fitness, or health orientation. To ascertain where the differences occurred, a Tukey post hoc test was performed. Significant differences were found: (a) (while the sport and fitness courses did not differ significantly) the students rated the sport courses as significantly more organized than the health courses; (b) students in the sport and fitness courses had a significantly better overall experience than did the students who were enrolled in the health courses; (c) the students' improvement in fitness was the highest for the fitness courses (compared to the sport and health courses); (d) the degree to which the course objectives were met were significantly lower for the health courses (as compared to the sport and fitness courses); and (e) the quality of the instructor was significantly higher for the sport and fitness courses (compared to the health courses). It must be noted that the nature of the health courses may have skewed these results. Table 4 provides a presentation of the mean ratings of the quality of the sport, fitness, and health courses.

Discussion

Implications of the Findings

Perhaps one of the most critical aspects of learning how to present and deliver a program or activity in a satisfactory manner is identifying factors that influence the participants' involvement in the program/activity and evaluating their assessment of their overall experience. With regard to physical education, Silverman and Subramaniam (1999) reported that teacher behavior and the content of the curriculum have significant impacts on students' attitudes and experiences. They also reported that students who were exposed to a curriculum that focused on a variety of activities tended to view physical education positively. Findings from this investigation suggested that the SFHP met each of these criteria: (a) the instructor (teacher behavior) received the highest rating of quality among all the factors identified, (b) the content of the courses received favorable evaluations, and (c) the program offered a multitude of course offerings related to sport, fitness, and health.

Another important discovery in this investigation was the demographic composition of the students. The results of this study revealed that the SFHP attracted undergraduate as well as graduate/professional students, and enrolled higher percentages of ethnic minority students than did the university at large. The wide array of course offerings may have contributed to the diverse student representation. Nonetheless, there are still ways of utilizing sport, health, and fitness to create multicultural learning experiences in a manner that further increases the diversity among the students, while simultaneously enhancing the courses. One strategy would be to engage in culturally appropriate packaging of the content of the courses (i.e., demonstrate the ethnic groups' contribution to the history of the sport/activity; introduce sport/leisure activities that are indigenous to different cultures; utilize music from different cultures in aerobics/fitness courses, etc.). The strategy basically involves imbuing the courses in a manner that *has* some cultural relevance to different ethnic groups, and will simultaneously embellish the experiences of the students who are members of the dominant culture. Also (in regard to the demographic composition of the students), a substantial

Table 4

Mean Ratings of the Quality of the Sport, Fitness, and Health Courses Based on Listed Factors

Factor	Sport Mean (SD)	Fitness Mean (SD)	Health Mean (SD)
1. My instructor.	6.32 (1.20)	6.20 (1.12)	5.82 (1.56)*
2. My overall experience.	5.97 (1.20)	5.88 (1.16)	5.64 (1.38)*
3. The degree to which course objectives were met.	5.95 (1.24)	5.87 (1.14)	5.69 (1.41)*
4. Course content.	5.85 (1.24)	5.79 (1.22)	5.83 (1.29)
5. Course organization.	5.88 (1.22)	5.81 (1.19)*	5.70 (1.34)*
6. My improvement in fitness.	4.39 (1.80)*	5.88 (1.16)*	3.82 (2.06)*

* Asterisks indicate statistically significant differences in the mean (all are at the .01 level) as indicated by a Tukey post hoc test.

percentage (i.e., 17%) of the students did not provide their gender; therefore the gender representation should be interpreted with some caution. However, based on the responses of students who did reply to that question, the SFHP appeared to have a gender balance among the students. Thus, the SFHP may be promoted as a viable option for leisure and fitness for graduate and undergraduate male and female students and should be presented as co-educational activities. Furthermore, promotional items such as brochures, pamphlets, and posters should reflect

a portrait of the diverse groups of students that enroll in SFHP.

The findings of this investigation also revealed that many of the students were repeat customers. Students tended to enroll in the SFHP for sport, fitness, and health-related reasons, rather than merely seeking to fulfill an elective requirement in their major or minor area of study. Identifying these motives is critical to the proper positioning of SFHP in the minds of the students. What is noteworthy is that students were enrolling in SFHP because they *wanted* to and not because they *had* to.

Another interesting finding of this investigation was the students' dissatisfaction with their overall improvement in fitness. Although students were the least satisfied with their overall improvement in fitness (compared to other components of their experience), they apparently held themselves responsible (rather than their instructors) for their lack of improvement because the "performance of the instructor" received the highest overall rating. Even though the students may not have held the instructors responsible for their improvement in fitness, perhaps the courses need to be revised in a manner that will promote an optimal improvement in fitness. Since it was found that the SFHP has "good" instructors (which is a critical component in delivering the quality educational services students are seeking), perhaps the instructors need to take a more active role in the students' improvement in fitness. Moreover, the good instruction offered in the SFHP should be advertised (i.e., through student testimonials in brochures) and communicated to students throughout the university.

This investigation revealed that the SFHP was generally providing satisfactory service, fulfilling its mission, and meeting its programmatic objectives of enhancing the health and quality of life of the students through the promotion of an active and healthy lifestyle. There were, however, also some indications of areas that needed improvement. For example, the students': (a) assessment of the course content, the quality of their overall experience, and the degree to which the course objectives were met as being in the range between "better than average" and "good"; and (b) their rating of the course organization and their improvement in fitness as "average", suggested that some modifications could be made in each of those areas to improve the evaluations to an "excellent" rating. Also, given the nature of the sport and fitness courses, it was not surprising that students rated them significantly higher than they did the health courses, and that students who were enrolled in the sport and fitness courses reported a more enjoyable overall experience than did those who were enrolled in the health courses. Unlike sport and fitness courses, a built-in excitement factor is not a luxury that is inherent in many health courses. Therefore, more creative effort and energy may be needed in the organization and delivery of the health courses to improve the overall experience of the students. From an overall marketing perspective, however, the SFHP should be promoted as a quality program that serves a diverse array of students and offers a multitude of activities for students in pursuit of: (a) an increased knowledge about health and fitness related issues, (b) a means of enhancing overall fitness through regular participation in physical activity, and (c) skill development opportunities.

Marketing and Physical Education

The charge physical educators have in improving the mental, physical, and social health and well-being of the nation necessitates the need for physical educators to explore the manner in which marketing activities may enable them to better serve their students. Marketing is often (and inappropriately) used interchangeably with "selling" as a business concept. Although physical education programs need to "sell" the importance of physical activity to students, marketing is much more than selling. Marketing is a business concept, however, it is one that begins and ends with satisfying the wants and needs of the target consumers (Shank, 1999). Marketing actually

refers to all of the activities that seek to facilitate and expedite a satisfactory exchange relationship. Rather than viewing marketing as a set of manipulative sales activities, physical educators should perceive marketing as the comprehensive manner of identifying who their consumers are, ascertaining the factors that motivate their attendance/involvement, and developing measures to satisfy them to sustain their patronage. With this definition of marketing, it becomes apparent that physical educators must embrace the contributions "marketing" may make to their efforts to devise effective programs and deliver quality instruction that will sustain enrollment and promote physically active students. Thus, it is important for physical educators to realize that they too are in the "marketing" business. The delivery of physical education/activity courses is a part of the marketing exchange between a university and its students.

It is also important for physical educators to understand that when consumers (including those that are seeking educationally-related services) are generally dissatisfied with the services they are receiving from a particular institution or organization, they often find other means of obtaining the desired services elsewhere. Regarding physical activity, opportunities abound for students' sport and leisure needs to be met in non-educational (corporate and community-based) settings, further necessitating a need for physical educators to analyze the overall promotion and delivery of their programs. As such, physical educators should make concerted efforts to conduct needs assessments and self-studies to analyze their product (physical education programs/courses) and to ascertain how it should be packaged (i.e., with regards to content, organization, and structure), promoted (i.e.. measures to encourage and motivate attendance/ enrollment), and delivered (i.e., process and quality of instruction) to create a satisfying exchange relationship with their primary target market — their students. Many physical educators are already engaging in similar practices. Such practices are considered a function of good teaching and/or quality instruction. These practices are also examples of good "marketing".

Conclusion

This case study did not offer any new or groundbreaking results. However, this exploratory investigation: (a) identified who the SFHP students were, (b) determined the rate in which students enrolled in the courses offered, (c) measured the influence of a variety of factors on the students' enrollment decision, (d) ascertained the manner in which students evaluated the quality of the courses, and (e) identified the areas for improvement in the overall promotion and delivery of its courses. The essence of these activities comprises the core of what marketing entails.

An asset as well as a liability of this study was the general appropriateness of the instrument used. Using such an instrument enabled the researchers to engage in a broad-based analysis of an entire physical activities program. However, based on the inherent nature of sport, fitness, and health courses that may have contributed to the differences found, future investigations may consider including only items that are specific to each course, rather than items that are generally applicable to courses that share a baseline similarity. Nonetheless, this investigation did enable the SFPH program at the respective university to ascertain some of its areas of strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, it also offered some valuable insight as to how physical educators can utilize basic marketing practices (such as needs assessment, service audit, and/or consumer analysis) to maximize student enrollment and to enhance students' overall learning experience.

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