

Physical Education Activity Program Survey

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This survey assessed the perceptions of students in the spring semester, 1984, about characteristics of and courses in the University of North Carolina's Physical Education Activities Program and obtained their suggestions for changes in the program. Frequency data and percentages were reported for each response on the 64-item questionnaire along with analysis of the data by year in college and gender. The majority of students were generally to extremely satisfied with the overall program, evaluated the quality of instruction as above average or excellent, preferred 1-hour classes twice a week for one semester in the same activity, liked having a letter or pass/fail grading option, and supported the university's two-course and swim-test requirements. Individual sports and fitness courses were the preferred offerings. Responses were consistent across years in college and gender.

Physical education activity programs at the university level merit reevaluation by administrators in order to meet students' needs, since often this is the only instructional opportunity in this discipline that students will experience. Also, restructuring and updating programs have been identified as major factors for their continued acceptance as viable parts of general education.

Hunsicker (1954) studied activity (also known as required, basic, service, and general) programs in American colleges and universities, Cordts and Shaw (1960) examined them in 1958, and Oxendine (1961, 1969, 1972; Oxendine & Robert, 1978) conducted four separate studies over a period of 17 years. More recently, physical activity programs on the college and university level were featured in the *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* in May 1982. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education sponsored a 1984 study of activity programs at 4-year colleges and universities.

Three fundamental issues regarding these programs have been discussed in the literature: required versus elected programs, grading methods, and curricular offerings. Concerning the first issue, Hunsicker (1954) surveyed approximately 100 colleges and universities and found that over 86% of the respondents required at least 1 year of activity courses for graduation; 57% of these required a second year. Also, 33% of these institu-

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tions mandated that students pass a swimming course or proficiency test in order to graduate. Cordts and Shaw (1960) noted a decrease to 67% in the number of schools requiring physical education, with approximately 50% of them reporting a 2-year requirement. Specific activities, most often swimming, were required by 58% of those responding.

Oxendine's surveys (1961, 1969, 1972, 1978) provided a longitudinal look at programs. He found that physical education was required for graduation by 84% of the schools in 1961, 87% in 1968, 74% in 1972, and 57% in 1977. Some 68% of the respondents in 1961 maintained a 2-year requirement, while his subsequent surveys reported 66%, 57%, and less than 33%, respectively. A swimming proficiency requirement existed in over 50% of the schools with an enrollment of 5,000 or more students in 1961. Seventeen years later Oxendine reported that 46% of the institutions maintained this requirement.

Modifying Oxendine's instrument, Trimble and Hensley (1984) reported that the number of 4-year colleges and universities requiring physical education had stabilized at 60%. A 1-year requirement remained at 41% of the institutions, while 25% of the schools retained the 2-year requirement. Although 72% reported no specific required activities, there was a tendency for smaller schools to mandate swimming.

Grading methods in physical education activity courses have remained relatively unchanged in the past 30 years. Hunsicker (1954) reported that 66% of the programs surveyed assigned letter grades, compared with 23% who use a pass/fail system of grading. Cordts and Shaw (1969) found that 74% employed letter grades and 15% used pass/fail. Only 5% of the respondents utilized a satisfactory/unsatisfactory form of evaluation, and 4% assigned numerical ratings.

Oxendine's four surveys also indicated grading variations with 74%, 77%, and 66% of the institutions awarding letter grades in 1961, 1968, and 1972, respectively. The pass/fail option was employed by 20% of the schools in 1968, 41% in 1972, and 31% in 1977. Some schools used both grading methods. Oxendine concluded that the smaller institutions in his sample were more likely to employ pass/fail grading. He also noted a trend toward allowing students the option of choosing a particular system of grading, although Trimble and Hensley (1984) reported that a decreased number of schools allowed this option. Of their respondents, 62% indicated a letter grading system while 24% utilized the pass/fail method. LaPoint (1982) reported that the use of letter grades was the most frequent choice in programs that gave students an option.

The literature presents some noteworthy trends in activity course offerings, particularly within the past two decades. Since the early 1960s, team sports have declined in popularity while individual and dual sports have gained enthusiasts. Oxendine reported the emergence of recreational and fitness-oriented activities as early as 1968. O'Connor (1982) identified a philosophical emphasis on lifetime or carry-over activities in the 1970s, with tennis being the most popular. Respondents to the Trimble and Hensley study (1984) ranked these courses as most popular: (1) racquetball; (2) tennis and aerobic dance (tie); (4) jogging; (5) weight training; (6) snow skiing; (7) swimming; (8) skin and scuba diving and volleyball (tie); (10) golf, martial arts, and bowling (tie); (13) social dance; and (14) softball and soccer (tie). Individual sports led these selections with 38%, while basic fitness activities contributed 17%, team sports claimed 13%, aquatics and dance/rhythms each comprised 11%, and outdoor skills and combative activities split the remaining 10%.

At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, two activity program studies have been conducted by Lumpkin and Miller (1978) and by Arwe and Jacobs (1981). Rather

than surveying administrators' opinions, both examined responses from students currently enrolled in the physical education activity program at that institution. Lumpkin and Miller attempted to determine the current status of high school physical education programs and then to ascertain the preferred curriculum offerings for physical education activities at their institution. They found that the traditional team sports of basketball, volleyball, and softball were the most often required, offered, and elected activities in the high schools in the mid-1970s.

Students preferred to enroll at the university in beginning tennis, intermediate tennis, lifesaving, water safety instructor, and racquetball. Among activities not in the curriculum at that time, students indicated interest in taking sailing, snow skiing, canoeing, backpacking, cycling, recreational sports, archery, yoga, track and field, and judo. In addition to the 1-year requirement of physical education, students indicated an interest in electing courses, with more than 25% of them desiring to enroll in one activity class every semester.

Arwe and Jacobs (1981) examined students' opinions of the existing physical education activity program and their views regarding possible changes in or additions to it. The 10 most popular activities in order of preference were tennis, racquetball, bowling, volleyball, swimming, lifesaving, self-defense, exercise and conditioning, handball, and soccer. Nontraditional offerings that students indicated they would like the program to include were similar to those noted in the earlier study—downhill skiing, sailing, horseback riding, canoeing, camping, backpacking, recreational sports, and cycling. In terms of the required versus elected question, almost 50% of the students preferred a 1-year requirement, while approximately 20% favored a totally elected program and 15% chose a one-semester requirement. If the program was entirely elective, 42% indicated they would enroll in more than two electives, 28% in the two electives, and 21% in one elective, while 9% would not enroll in a physical education activity course.

The Arwe and Jacobs study reported that 55% of the respondents were satisfied with the letter grading system while the remainder favored a pass/fail system. Almost 60% of the students favored the swimming test requirement, while approximately the same number indicated that the swim test was of value since it ensured that students could survive in the water.

The present study examines practices and trends occurring in the 4 years since Arwe and Jacobs' research. The objectives of this research were (a) to measure students' opinions of the present activity program and (b) to survey students' interests in program changes or additions.

Procedures

Subjects ($N = 2,567$) signed informed consent forms and were administered a 64-item questionnaire developed by Lumpkin and Avery to assess students' perceptions about current program characteristics, courses, and desired changes in the physical education activity program. The questionnaire was derived from a multiple response format with the response range including two to five alternatives. The subjects' responses were converted to frequencies to describe the nature of the data. These frequencies are reported as a function of gender and academic year. In addition, current activities were ranked in order of popularity as perceived by students.

Results

Students' overall opinions of the current physical education activity program were overwhelmingly positive, as 22.87% were extremely satisfied and 67.3% were generally satisfied (see Table 1). Concerning the quality of instruction, 35.3% evaluated it as excellent, 46.5% as above average, and 16.4% as average.

Students were also questioned about their preference in scheduling, grading, and course offerings. Concerning class content, 78.3% preferred to take one activity per semester rather than two different ones (11.7%), or one for an entire year (8.8%). Preferred scheduling for 50.51% was the existing 1-hour classes twice a week, while the remaining responses

Table 1

Descriptive data		
<i>Year in college (%)</i>		
Freshmen	1351	(52.7)
Sophomores	593	(23.1)
Juniors	288	(11.2)
Seniors	299	(11.6)
Graduate students	28	(1.1)
<i>Gender (%)</i>		
Females	1472	(57.4)
Males	1077	(42)
<i>Experience (%)</i>		
1st required activity	546	(21.4)
2nd required activity	1440	(56.3)
1st elected activity	314	(12.3)
2nd elected activity	93	(3.6)
More than 2nd elected activity	160	(6.3)
<i>Overall opinion of program (%)</i>		
Extremely dissatisfied	24	(.9)
Generally dissatisfied	86	(3.4)
No opinion	136	(5.3)
Generally satisfied	1723	(67.3)
Extremely satisfied	582	(22.8)
<i>Quality of instruction (%)</i>		
Very poor	13	(.5)
Below average	25	(.98)
Average	419	(16.4)
Above average	189	(46.5)
Excellent	903	(35.3)
<i>Class content (%)</i>		
One activity per semester	1990	(78.3)
Two activities per semester	298	(11.7)
One activity per year	224	(8.8)

Table 1 (cont.)

Descriptive Data		
<i>Preferred class scheduling (%)</i>		
1 2-hour class a week	317	(12.6)
1 1/2-hour classes twice a week	259	(10.3)
1-hour classes 3 times a week	483	(19.2)
Late afternoon or early evening classes twice a week	177	(7)
1-hour classes twice a week	1271	(50.5)
<i>Grading (%)</i>		
A, B, C, D, F	256	(10)
Pass/fail	786	(30.8)
Option of A, B, C, D, F or pass/fail	1280	(50.1)
Not graded	213	(8.3)
<i>Develop individualized program (%)</i>		
Yes	1301	(51.3)
No	1208	(47.6)
<i>Required vs. elected (%)</i>		
1 semester	310	(12.2)
2 semester	1313	(51.7)
3 semester	139	(5.5)
4 semester	212	(8.4)
Elective	561	(22.1)
<i>Courses taken if elected (%)</i>		
1 course	310	(16.6)
2 courses	652	(25.7)
More than 2 courses	1260	(49.7)
None	190	(7.5)
<i>Swim test required? (%)</i>		
Yes	1362	(53.7)
No	1117	(44.1)
<i>Value of swim test requirement (%)</i>		
Survive in water	1459	(57.4)
Learn to swim	176	(6.9)
Adequate swimming skills	427	(16.8)
No value	465	(18.3)

chose one 2-hour class per week, 1 1/2-hour class twice a week, 1-hour classes three times a week, and late afternoon or early evening classes twice a week for 1 hour. While 8.3% preferred having no grades in physical education activity classes, 10% selected the letter grade method, 30.8% chose the pass/fail option, and 50.1% indicated that they liked the current policy of offering the option of letter or pass/fail grading.

Responding to the question about the university's two-semester physical education activity requirement, 50.7% favored it while 12.2% preferred a one-semester, 5.5% a

three-semester, and 8.4% a four-semester requirement. A totally elected program was desired by 22.1%. If the program became totally elected, 16.6% would take one course, 25.7% would take two courses, 49.7% would take more than two courses, and 7.5% would take none. Over half (53.7%) supported the university's required swim test. Ensuring that each student had the ability to survive in the water was the major (57.4%) justification, with 6.9% supporting the goal that each student should learn to swim, and 16.8% noting that it ensured each student had adequate swimming skills.

Tables 2 through 8 provide data analyzed by gender and by year in college. Freshmen (19%), sophomores (21.8%), and juniors (28%) took elected courses to improve their skills, while seniors (30.2%) did so more to participate in regular physical activity (see Table 2). A steady increase in the desire to participate in regular physical activity was noted from the freshmen through graduate students' responses.

Table 2

	Question 4: Why have you enrolled in this course as an elective?					
	To learn a new activity (%)		To improve skills (%)		To participate in regular physical activity (%)	
	F = 250 (17.10)		F = 239 (16.35)		F = 277 (18.95)	
	M = 234 (21.93)		M = 285 (26.71)		M = 120 (11.25)	
Freshmen	235	(17.56)	254	(18.98)	136	(10.16)
Sophomores	116	(19.76)	128	(21.81)	86	(14.65)
Juniors	59	(20.63)	80	(27.97)	77	(26.92)
Seniors	67	(22.48)	60	(20.13)	90	(30.20)
Graduate students	9	(32.14)	6	(21.43)	10	(35.71)

Males' (26.7%) leading reason for taking elected courses was to improve skills, whereas more females (19%) simply wanted to participate in regular physical activity. Regular exercise was the primary reason for enrollment for students in their first (41%) or second (37.5%) activity class, while less than one third of each group wanted to learn a new activity or to improve skills. Those enrolled in their second elected course (34.8%) chose skill improvement as their leading reason. Overwhelmingly, students enrolled in their first (82.5%) or second (82.7%) required class based their course selection on interest. Students' participation in other regular physical activity did not vary with year in college. However, males (74.6%) were more active outside of classes than were females (60.1%).

Opinion of the overall activity program by year in college and gender was remarkably consistent, as both groups were extremely or generally satisfied (see Table 3). More freshmen (39.8%) and females (37.3%) evaluated the quality of instruction as excellent (see Table 4).

Slightly more males (69.6%) than females (68%) indicated that they would further develop their skills and knowledge following the conclusion of their current course. Juniors

Table 3

Question 8: What is your opinion of the current physical education activity program?

	Extremely satisfied (%)		Generally satisfied (%)	
	F = 359 (24.44)		F = 977 (66.51)	
	M = 216 (20.13)		M = 740 (68.97)	
Freshmen	340	(25.24)	882	(65.48)
Sophomores	129	(21.83)	406	(68.70)
Juniors	54	(18.82)	205	(71.43)
Seniors	51	(17.11)	205	(68.79)
Graduate students	8	(28.57)	18	(64.29)

Table 4

Question 37: What best describes the quality of instruction in the activity classes you have taken?

	Excellent (%)		Above average (%)	
	F = 549 (37.32)		F = 680 (46.23)	
	M = 347 (32.37)		M = 502 (46.83)	
Freshmen	537	(39.84)	597	(44.29)
Sophomores	193	(32.66)	285	(48.22)
Juniors	87	(30.31)	134	(46.69)
Seniors	75	(25.17)	152	(51.01)
Graduate students	9	(32.14)	16	(57.14)

(75.2%), seniors (72.2%), and graduate students (89.3%) were more likely to continue to develop their skills and knowledge than were freshmen (66.9%) and sophomores (66.3%). All classes and both females and males preferred the twice-a-week-for-1-hour class format (see Table 5).

The two-semester requirement was supported by the majority of students—freshmen (53.5%), sophomores (52.7%), juniors (50.7%), females (50.7%), and males (53.1%). An elected program was supported by 20.1% of the freshmen, 23.5% of the sophomores, 20.4% of the juniors, and 29.4% of the seniors. More females (24.9%) than males (18.3%) preferred an elected program. In the absence of a requirement, only 7.1% of the freshmen, 8% of the sophomores, 4.6% of the juniors, and 11.5% of the seniors would not enroll in one or more activity classes (see Table 6). Between 43% (freshmen) and 66.7% (juniors) would elect to take more than two classes. Approximately the same percentage of females (51%) and males (47.7%) also preferred to take more than two activity classes, while only 7% of the females and 8.2% of the males would choose to take none.

Table 5

Question 42: If you would prefer alternative scheduling, would you be interested in:

	One 2-hr class (%)	1 1/2 hrs twice/wk (%)	One 3-hr class (%)	Late after- noon/early eve. class twice/wk (%)	Two 1-hr classes (%)
	F = 178 (12.19) M = 137 (12.83)	F = 108 (7.46) M = 150 (14.26)	F = 285 (19.68) M = 193 (18.35)	F = 122 (8.43) M = 52 (4.94)	F = 747 (51.59) M = 520 (49.43)
Freshmen	172 (13.01)	128 (9.68)	230 (17.40)	195 (7.19)	694 (52.5)
Sophomores	76 (12.99)	54 (9.23)	110 (18.8)	38 (6.5)	305 (52.14)
Juniors	27 (9.61)	41 (14.59)	56 (19.93)	19 (6.76)	136 (48.4)
Seniors	36 (12.2)	30 (10.17)	78 (26.44)	24 (8.14)	124 (42.03)
Graduate students	4 (14.29)	6 (21.43)	8 (28.57)	— —	10 (35.71)

Table 6

Question 46: If the program became totally elective, would you take:

	1 elective (%)	2 electives (%)	More than 2 electives (%)	No activity classes (%)
	F = 265 (18.14) M = 153 (14.43)	F = 341 (23.34) M = 307 (28.96)	F = 745 (50.99) M = 506 (47.74)	F = 102 (6.98) M = 87 (8.21)
Freshmen	258 (19.34)	399 (29.91)	574 (43.03)	95 (7.12)
Sophomores	81 (13.75)	154 (26.15)	304 (51.61)	47 (7.98)
Juniors	37 (12.98)	45 (15.79)	190 (66.67)	13 (4.56)
Seniors	40 (13.47)	48 (16.16)	171 (57.58)	34 (11.45)
Graduate students	2 (8.0)	4 (16.0)	19 (76.0)	— —

Over half of the freshmen (51.34%), sophomores (51.2%), juniors (51.2%), and women (51%) preferred the option of letter or pass/fail grading, as did those taking elected courses. Ten percent or less of all groups supported nongraded classes (see Table 7). Approximately half of the classes and students of both genders expressed an interest in developing a personal activity program (see Table 8). Of the 28 different activities offered in the program, the 10 that students indicated the greatest interest in taking were tennis,

Table 7

Question 47: How would you prefer physical education activity classes to be graded?

	A, B, C, D, F (%)		Pass/fail (%)		Option of grades or pass/fail (%)		Not graded (%)	
	F = 112 (7.64)		F = 470 (32.06)		F = 747 (50.95)		F = 129 (8.80)	
	M = 143 (13.36)		M = 309 (28.88)		M = 529 (49.44)		M = 81 (7.57)	
Freshmen	156	(11.62)	385	(28.69)	689	(51.34)	104	(7.75)
Sophomores	55	(9.29)	176	(29.73)	303	(51.18)	52	(8.78)
Juniors	24	(8.36)	97	(33.80)	147	(51.22)	19	(6.62)
Seniors	19	(6.35)	119	(39.80)	129	(43.14)	30	(10.03)
Graduate students	1	(4.0)	6	(24.0)	10	(40.0)	7	(28.0)

Table 8

Question 61: Would you be interested in developing a personal activity program in lieu of one semester of the present physical education requirement?

	Yes (%)		No (%)	
	F = 754 (51.79)		F = 694 (47.66)	
	M = 539 (50.66)		M = 507 (47.65)	
Freshmen	689	(51.53)	633	(47.34)
Sophomores	302	(51.45)	281	(47.87)
Juniors	146	(51.23)	135	(47.37)
Seniors	154	(51.85)	138	(46.46)
Graduate students	9	(36.0)	16	(64.0)

racquetball, downhill skiing, weight training, swimming, bowling, aerobic dance, exercise and conditioning, life-saving, and golf, respectively (see Table 9).

When each course, such as beginning tennis and intermediate tennis, was measured individually rather than as an activity, the top ranked offerings (all beginners' courses) were racquetball, scuba diving, karate, downhill skiing, weight training, bowling, fencing, golf, tennis, and handball. Thirteen activities were listed for students to check whether they would elect to enroll if offered. Their rank order with percentages of positive responses was sailing (72.9%), horseback riding (67.9%), ice skating (63.2%), canoeing (53.9%), cross-country skiing (53.7%), cycling (47%), camping (41.8%), recreational sports (39.4%), backpacking (38.5%), judo (30.6%), crew (29.2%), track and field (24.7%), and yoga (22.9%).

Table 9 (cont.)

	Overall sport or activity ranking			Rank by class			Overall course ranking by level			Overall course ranking by class			Gender		
	Fr.	So.	Sr.	Fr.	So.	Jr.	Fr.	So.	Jr.	Fr.	So.	Jr.	Sr.	F	M
Karate	13	15	13	13	15	10	13	18	12	3	5	1	3	7	3
Modern dance	20	20	21	19	20	22	21	12	23	13	16	19	13	11	32
Racquetball	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Introduction to dance technique	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	22	25	36-y	27	33	23-y	20	26
Soccer	16	16	14	16	16	15	14	21	10	19	21	15	15	22	17
Squash	27	27	27	28	27	27	27	28	20	31	36	32	30	34	21
Swimming	5	5	6	11	5	7	6	4	7	34	34	17-y	18-y	24	34
										20-y	20-y	17-y	18-y	32-y	15-y
										30-z	26-z	35-z	30-z	29-z	24-z
Tennis	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	9	13	15	12	9	14
										13-y	17-y	7-y	12	21-y	10-y
											36-z		16-z		31-z
Volleyball	12	11	12	10	11	9	12	16	9	29	31	30	34	30	20
Exercise and conditioning	8	12	6	9	12	6	7	7	15	23-y	22-y	12-y	14-y	28-y	13-y
Weight training	4	6	4	3	6	4	3	6	3	12	18	10	14	33	27
Scuba diving	11	10	13	7	10	13	11	17	8	33-y	34-y	25-y	32-y	12-y	30-y
										5	6	5	6	2	10
										31-y	34-y	25-y	25-y	25-y	16-y
										2	2	3	2	5	1
Social dance	19	25	23	17	25	23	24	13	21	17	23	23	23	24-y	27
											21	23	23	13	

y = intermediate, z = advanced

Discussion

The students' overall opinions of the current physical education activity program were most favorable. Over two-thirds of the respondents indicated they were generally satisfied, while more than one-fifth said they were extremely satisfied with the current program. The most popular activities in the program have changed only slightly since the Arwe and Jacobs study 4 years earlier. Six of those activities previously rated in the top 10 were given the same distinction in the previous study. No team sports appeared in the list of the 10 most popular activities. The list was dominated by individual sports such as tennis, racquetball, downhill skiing, bowling, golf, and fitness-oriented activities such as weight training, swimming, aerobics, and exercise and conditioning. It would appear that the trend toward activities of a recreational and fitness nature noted by Oxendine in 1968 continued to increase through 1984, supporting the findings of Trimble and Hensley (1984).

In terms of the required versus elected program, student opinion has not changed significantly in the past 4 years. Slightly more than half of the respondents favored the current two-semester requirement, a small increase over the previous study's results. There was a slight increase in the number who favored a totally elected program, from 20% in 1980 to 22% in 1984. The popularity of the program was verified by the almost 50% of the students who indicated they would take more than two activity courses even if not required. This figure compares favorably with the response reported in 1980.

Conclusion

It is important to determine that the majority of students are satisfied with the existing physical education activities program. However, changes in interests in preferred offerings indicate that administrators cannot afford to rest on their laurels. The program must be examined regularly in order to be sure it is relevant to students' needs and interests, as well as to expand offerings. Activity courses offer many students an introduction to physical education, provide a positive learning environment for fitness and skill development, and thus comprise a valuable part of students' total educational experience. While the findings of this study may not be generalizable to other colleges and universities, administrators may find that these results substantiate their personal assessments of national trends as they affect local activity programs. Also, this study may encourage administrators to evaluate students' perceptions of the existing program structure and students' interests in new courses in their institution.

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