

4-2015

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The Effects of Intramural Sports on College Students

TYLER P. WARD

Many freshmen university students are coming to college straight from their senior year of high school. While in high school, extracurricular activities are all but forced on students. These involve sports, clubs, organizations, etc. One popular extracurricular option that most colleges offer are intramural sports. This type of activity has many benefits for students, but only if they are able to participate. Socially, being involved on an intramural team can increase a student's sense of belonging and make him or her feel more connected to a university. Being active and athletic is also good for preventing diseases, reducing the onset of mental illnesses and increasing grades. Giving everyone an opportunity to participate in intramural sports is no easy feat and there are barriers that can prevent or limit a student's participation.

Intramural is defined as 'being situated or done within the walls of a building.' (Artinger, et al., 2006) This definition was adapted to mean within a single educational institution or college. Therefore, intramural sports literally means sports taking place within a single college. Basically any sport imaginable can be set up formally as an intramural sport. The most common are those played in high school that take minimal equipment, such as basketball, soccer, and volleyball. Some of the more equipment-intensive sports, like football or hockey, are often lacking from the intramural sports options; but, instead, have club options or a higher level, such as varsity. Often, students form their own individual teams from a group of their close friends or from others who live in the same community that they do.

There are obvious benefits to physical activity and intramural sports. One is a decrease in the 'freshmen fifteen', what is known as the expected fifteen pounds that freshmen students normally put on due to an increased sedentary lifestyle and increased food consumption; another is a promotion of an overall healthier lifestyle. While actually gaining fifteen pounds in a year may seem like a lot, research shows that college students put on weight much more quickly their

first year of college than any subsequent years of adulthood for both males and females. (Holm-Denoma, Joiner Jr., Vohs, & Heatherton, 2008, p. S3)

With an increase in childhood and adulthood obesity, being more active and establishing healthy routines can actually decrease the prevalence of diseases such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. (Bocarro, Kanters, Casper, & Forrester, 2008) The consistent exercise which can be provided by participating in intramural sports is a good preventative measure for adult diabetes, obesity, and other health-related illnesses. (Bocarro, Kanters, Casper, & Forrester, 2008, p. 155) Participating in intramural sports and exercising also is associated with an increase in expected lifespan, but this increase is seen because of the aforementioned decrease in disease. (Reimers, Knapp, & Reimers, 2012)

Physical activity can also benefit a student's mental performance and stability. Living a healthy lifestyle, including getting exercise every day and eating well, has been shown to decrease the occurrence of depression. (Artinger, et al., 2006) Depression is a common ailment in today's youth, and can lead to self-harming thoughts and actions, or potentially suicide ideations or actions. Improving mental health definitely can help to better a student's overall mood as well as mental state in general. (Artinger, et al., 2006) Playing intramural sports is shown to decrease overall stress as well as a marketed increase in a student's self-esteem. (Artinger, et al., 2006) There also exists a correlation between increased physical activity, such as intramural sports, and a significant reduction in the symptoms of depression. (Paluska & Schwenk, 2000) As the level of physical activity daily or weekly increased, depression and its associated symptoms become less prevalent. (Paluska & Schwenk, 2000)

Participating in intramural sports quite often is associated with higher grades. The purpose of college is to earn grades and eventually receive a degree; intramural sports may be the

stress-relief that a student needs. Participating in intramural sports can actually affect the biochemistry of the brain and can restructure brain morphology. (Tenenbaum & Eklund, 2007, p. 472) This can have a positive effect on how a student functions and can drastically influence study habits.

Intramurals are often an important part of a college student's experience, one that helps to bond them to other students in their community as well as feeling more connected to the university as a whole. The teamwork and comradery formed while playing on a team are important parts of the connectedness of the college as a whole and can be part of the reason why colleges, such as Grand Valley State University, have mottos like, "Laker for a Lifetime", which promotes being connected to a university even after graduation. Being involved in intramural sports actually increases the ease of integrating socially, and can make the transition to a new college easier. (Artinger, et al., 2006) Retention rates are also higher for students that consistently participate in intramural sports and other campus recreation activities. (Belch, Gebel, & Maas, 2001, p. 257) This includes students with similarly low GPAs, as the group who participated more on campus, via participating in intramural sports, joining student organizations, etc., tended to not drop out compared with the group who did not participate as much. (Belch, Gebel, & Maas, 2001)

Not every student has equal access to intramural sports. Students that live on-campus often are presented more information about intramural sports, as they are easier to access from the intramural sports office or campus recreation headquarters. Also, certain barriers can limit a freshman's participation, including not knowing when sign-up dates are and not being able to find a team. Many factors can come into play when intramural sports time arrives, but the goal of every intramural office is to encourage as many student as they can to play and support their

university or college while growing closer to fellow classmates. Therefore, limiting any barriers that may be found to impede participation is important.

Around half of the students surveyed during an intramural sports survey conducted at Grand Valley State University indicated that not knowing when deadlines for sign-ups for certain sports were a major factor in them not participating. This survey questioned GVSU students about their involvement in intramural sports and asked about any barriers to playing that they may encounter. This can occur because freshmen are given a large influx of information their first couple of days on campus, and information on intramural sports may fall out of importance. A possible remedy for this would be to better highlight the sports through the use of large posters or to create individual flyers for students to get soon after they finally get moved in. A potential brochure is attached. (Appendix A & B)

It is harder for students that do not live on-campus to get involved in intramural sports and these same students often do not enjoy the same level of benefits as their on-campus counterparts. (Artinger, et al., 2006, p. 80) Non-freshmen see this reduction of benefits as well. However, freshmen in general see the greatest social benefits from participating and being involved in a diverse group than upper-classmen at a university.

Living in a traditional-style dorm, which is traditionally characterized by community bathrooms, shared rooms, and numerous rooms in a single building, can make it easy to meet new people, and consequently, find an intramural team. Other living styles, such as the suite living style or apartment living style, may not be as conducive for finding a group of active students who enjoy the same sports because there tends to be less need to leave their room. Universities often attempt to remedy this situation by creating living center teams, led by either community leaders or possibly resident assistants or hall directors tasked with creating a sense of

community among a floor or specific building. The simple act of joining an intramural team early can help to form bonds that last the whole year and, often with playing on a living centers team, there is no or limited financial responsibility for those students participating, which helps to remove another barrier.

Another factor that may not be readily apparent is discrimination based on some demographic factor. This discrimination may be intentional or unintentional, such as having intramural sports signs in English only or having no translation options. International students tend to have a harder time integrating socially into a new school setting. The abrupt change in societal norms and difference in the consideration of the importance of education can cause several international students to shy away from intramural sports without even participating in them. (Shifman, Moss, D'Andrade, Eichel, & Forrester, 2011, p. 3) Many international students reported answers such as being too self-conscious, not being good at the sport, or being too shy to meet new people for reasons to not participate in intramural sports, as well as not knowing where games were or what sports were available, having a lack of time, and too much crowding in the actual sports games. (Shifman, Moss, D'Andrade, Eichel, & Forrester, 2011, p. 10) These certainly are not barriers that only international students face, but these barriers tend to appear more frequently when interacting with sensitive populations that may not be used to life in the U.S.A.

Intramural sports are a great outlet for college students. These sports give students a means of getting exercise every day and remaining healthy, as well as encouraging and building a stronger connection to both the other students on the team as well as the college or university as a whole. Intramurals have effects in the classroom as well, as grades are normally higher for those who participate in intramural sports, as well as a decrease in drop-out rate for those

students who do participate. Intramural sports are a great outlet, and getting as many students to participate that want to be involved should be a goal. Some barriers do arise, however, including lack of knowledge, language barriers, and even monetary obligations. As schools are pushing more towards inclusion and diversity, it may well give those students who have not had a chance to participate in intramural sports before their chance to participate. Giving out the information more readily to the first year population may be a solution and could boost the number of students that play intramural sports. The flyer attached would be a great informational tool for any freshman student to learn about Grand Valley's great intramural sports program. (Appendix A & B)

Appendix

A. Sample Brochure of Intramural Sports Data

Intramural sports start very early in the semester!

- Head to gvsu.edu/rec and click on the intramurals header for more information on individual sports and start dates.
- Check in with your residence hall R.A.s for an intramural team sponsored by housing
- Can't find a team? Join free agency! The link is on the IM Leagues website

GVSU Campus Recreation
 Rec Center D109
 Allendale, Michigan 49401

Fitness and Wellness Center
 Phone: (616) 331-3659
 Fax: (616) 331-3960
 E-mail: rec@gvsu.edu

Intramural Sports
 Phone: (616) 331-3224
 E-mail: gymtra@gvsu.edu



Interested in Intramural Sports?



Check inside for registration dates and information!



Seasons start as early as September 4th!





B. Sample Brochure of Intramural Sports Data, Cont.

Get signed up!

1. Head to imleagues.com
2. Click on the register button in the top right.
3. Answer all the questions, making sure to use your GVSU-given e-mail. (yourusername@gvsu.edu)
4. When signed in, head to the GVSU main page.
5. Once there, click the Intramurals link on the top-left of the page.
6. Scroll down and all of the intramural seasons and their deadlines will be listed.
7. Create a team or join a team of friends that are already playing.
8. Download the Rec-It app to stay up to date on your team and schedule!

Looking for Work?

Campus Recreation is always looking for workers to referee intramural sports games and work at the rec center!

Visit gvsu.edu/rec for more information

FALL DEADLINES

In order to utilize the pleasant weather at the start of the semester, several of the sports have deadlines for registering teams that are early in the school year!

Sport	Team Registration Deadline	Team Cost
Tennis	Sept. 4th	\$5/person
4 on 4 Sand Volleyball	Sept. 4th	\$55
Softball	Sept. 4th	\$60
2-person Golf Scramble	Sept. 11th	\$35/person
4 on 4 Floor Hockey	Sept. 11th	\$55
7 on 7 Outdoor Soccer	Sept. 11th	\$65
3 on 3 Basketball	Sept. 25th	\$20
7 on 7 Flag Football	Oct. 2nd	\$65
Ultimate Frisbee	Oct. 9th	\$30
6 on 6 Volleyball	Oct. 16th	\$60

WINTER DEADLINES

Winter Intramurals start soon after the semester starts! Be sure to check the dates below and get signed up in time.

Sport	Team Registration Deadline	Team Cost
5 on 5 Basketball	Jan. 8th	\$60
5 on 5 Indoor Soccer	Jan. 8th	\$55
Racquetball	Jan. 15th	\$60
Table Tennis	Jan. 22nd	\$35/person
Dodgeball	Jan. 29th	\$55
6 on 6 Volleyball	Feb. 3rd	\$65
Arena Flag Football	Mar. 12th	\$20
Kickball	Mar. 12th	\$65
Badminton	Mar. 26th	\$30
Broomball	Mar. 29th	\$60

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