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Promoting a Culture of Wellness Among Employees on a College Campus: Increasing Employee Usage of a Campus Wellness and Recreation Center

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Mayo Clinic (Creagan, 2018), the World Health Organization (Guthold, Stevens, Riley, & Bull, 2018), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS, 2008), less than twenty-five percent of working adults in the United States accumulate the recommended amount of daily moderate-intensity physical activity required for a healthy, active lifestyle. The aforementioned national statistics have remained relatively consistent over the course of the past two decades, where numerous studies have reported that only twenty-five percent of American adults in the workforce participate in the recommended one-hundred and fifty minutes per week, or thirty minutes per day per five days a week, of moderate-intensity physical activity required for a healthy lifestyle (Kahn, Ramsey, Brownson, Heath, Howze, Powell, Stone, Rajab, & Corso, 2002; Click, 2017; Creagan et al., 2018; Guthold et al., 2018). Currently, no comprehensive, concrete data exist regarding activity levels of collegiate faculty and staff members in the United States in any verifiable format, in relation to how they compare to the national workforce average. Where individual collegiate campus studies do exist (Johnson, 2014; Lloyd, Crixell, Bezner, Forester, & Swearington, 2017; Morrow, Call, Marcus, & Locke, 2018; Roncone, 2019), anecdotal and descriptive data tend to suggest that similar to national workforce statistics, approximately seventy-five percent of collegiate faculty and staff members fail to consistently accumulate the weekly suggested one-hundred and fifty minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity recommended by the Mayo Clinic, the World Health Organization , the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

As collegiate campuses nationwide have invested extensive resources into establishing physical structures and action plans to promote cultures of wellness on campuses over the past two decades (Linnan, Brooks, Haws, Benedict, Birkin, French, & Britt, 2010; Click, 2017; Lloyd

et al., 2017; Roncone, 2019), it would be logical to assume that activity levels of collegiate employees should be higher than those of the national average observed in the workforce. However, this does not appear to be the case. Despite increased access to physical facilities, counseling services, personal training advisors, recreational sports, and fitness classes, approximately seventy-five percent of university faculty still appear to be failing to accumulate the appropriate amount of suggested daily physical activity (Johnson, 2014; Lloyd, Crixell, Bezner, Forester, & Swearington, 2017; Morrow, Call, Marcus, & Locke, 2018; Roncone, 2019).

In order to discern the primary mitigating obstacles that may be hindering faculty and staff at one particular university from accumulating the recommended amounts of moderate-intensity physical activity, researchers initiated a case-study project evaluating employee usage of the campus Wellness and Recreation Center (WRC) on the Division-II campus; a campus with modern wellness center amenities and a campus-wide "culture-of-wellness" action plan. The primary objectives of the study were to determine what percentage of faculty and staff were frequenting the WRC; what percentage of faculty and staff were refraining from taking advantage of the WRC amenities; what constraints were hindering faculty and staff engagement in WRC activities; and what campus reforms and/or interventions could realistically be implemented to promote enhanced utilization of the WRC by faculty and staff.

On the identified campus, approximately eight-percent of faculty and staff held WRC memberships during the academic year the study was conducted; where less than four-percent of faculty and staff frequented the WRC one-hundred and fifty minutes per week, most weeks of the year, over the course of the academic year; with an unknow percent of employees opting to patronize off-campus business locations for fitness and wellness services. (Rosenberger & Whatley, 2019). The aforementioned statistics are quite alarming as research has consistently

shown that there is a strong-positive correlation between the benefits gained by both employees and employers with the implementation of an effective worksite health promotion program (Leininger, Harris, Tracz, & Marshall, 2013; Johnson, 2014; Borah, Eggington, Shah, Wagie, Olsen, Yao, Lopez, & Jimenez, 2015; Kramer, Molenaar, Arena, Venditti, Meehan, Miller, Vanderwood, Eaglehouse, & Kriska, 2015; Plotnikoff, Collins, Williams, Germov, & Callister, 2015). It is in the direct interest of a university, and a university system, to promote healthy physical activity engagement among employees, as such interventions have been shown to lead to increased work productivity (Baicker, Culture, & Song, 2010; Colombi & Wood, 2011; Clark, Jenkins, Limoges, Hagen, Lackore, Harris, Wernberg, Warren, & Olsen, 2013; Barte & Wendel-Vos, 2017); minimized employee health-care costs (Baicker, Culture, & Song, 2010; Colombi & Wood, 2011; Lee, Shiroma, Lobelo, Puska, Blair, & Katzmarzyk, 2012; Vilela, Silva, DeLira, & Andrade, 2015); and a general increased sense of employee happiness and well-being; (Clark, Jenkins, Limoges, Hagen, Lackore, Harris, Wernberg, Warren, & Olsen, 2013; Barte & Wendel-Vos, 2017).

In order to remediate failed policy and program initiatives that currently appear to be doing little to promote active, healthy lifestyle habits among employees, it is essential to accumulate factual data necessary to facilitate functional change. The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze environmental, behavioral and logistical factors that affect employee usage of the campus WRC, in order to design a logistically and conceptually sound intervention action plan that effectively promotes a culture of wellness on campus among faculty employees.

METHODS

Participants

This study was designed as a joint collaboration between administrative personnel overseeing the campus WRC and a research team comprised of faculty and graduate students in a School of Health and Human Performance (SHHP), in a College of Health Sciences (COHS), at a Division-II Liberal Arts University in the Southeastern United States. In order to implement targeted remediation strategies designed to increase usage of the WRC by full-time faculty and staff, all current full-time employees were identified as potential participants to be included in the study. Survey response rates for faculty and staff were observed at 13% of the total employee population. Faculty comprised 67% of total responses, whereas staff comprised 33% of total responses. Males comprised 31% of total responses, while female employees comprised 69% of total responses. Of male responders, 9% were in their 20's; 28% were in their 30's; 24% were in their 40's; and 39% were above the age of 50. Of female responders, 4% were in their 20's; 28% were in their 30's; 26% were in their 40's; and 42% were above the age of 50. Of responding faculty, 29% of males and 34% of females were from the College of Health Sciences; 33% of males and 15% of females were from the College of Business; 29% of males and 37% of females were from the College of Arts and Sciences; and 8% of males and 14% of females were from the College of Education. In regard to responding males, 64% reported engaging in physical activity at least 3-5 days per week, while 46% of responding females reported engaging in physical activity at least 3-5 days per week. 32% of males and 13% of females reported having WRC memberships; 23% of males and 33% of females reported having a membership to an off-campus facility; and 45% of males and 54% of females reported not having a membership at any wellness or fitness center. Of all responding employees, 96% reported being healthy enough for engagement in regular moderate-intensity physical activity.

Procedures

The faculty questionnaire distributed for the purposes of this study was designed using the electronic platform, Qualtrics. Construction of the survey was a collaborative effort between the COHS research team and the WRC administrative staff. The survey was modeled on similar surveys used in previous studies at other institutions for similar purposes; where content and construct-validity were established during the construction and piloting phase through collaboration with field-based experts and the implementation of Cronbach-alpha analyses. The final version of the completed, anonymous survey was distributed electronically via a campus listserv to individual employee email addresses. In order to increase response rates, the survey was distributed to faculty through each of the four individual colleges respective Deans' offices, as well as the Dean of Academic Affairs office for staff. Surveys were distributed in the spring semester, with an open response window of eight-weeks. Two separate reminders, at three-weeks and seven-weeks respectively, were distributed electronically to prompt completion of the survey. The survey was constructed in English; yet where translations were available upon request for employees who were non-English dominant speakers. Upon closing of the survey, all data was transferred from Qualtrics into SPSS-24 for analysis.

Data Collection

The survey included six demographic questions, identifying age, gender, faculty or staff designation, department, current fitness level, and WRC membership status. Depending on individual responses to WRC membership status, participants were directed to a series of ten satisfaction questions related to the WRC or a respective local wellness center facility patronized. Satisfaction levels among patrons were measured using a 1-5 Likert scale, on the following items: cost; operational hours; amenities; fitness classes; recreational sports; staff support and knowledge; equipment; rules and policies; child care, and parking; where 1

represented not satisfied, and 5 represented extremely satisfied. Following the survey section regarding current satisfaction levels with respective wellness centers, all participants, including those identifying as non-members of any wellness center, were directed to the survey section regarding potential enticements encouraging WRC membership. Ten promotional options were presented to participants, including: faculty only hours; increased weekend operational hours; earlier weekday opening hours; free health screenings and consultations; five free personal training sessions; online instructional videos of facility equipment; specified contractual allotted time in a workday for physical activity; child care; extended pool hours; and easier access to parking. Participants were able to identify which enticements were of most value using a 1-5 Likert scale per topic; where 1 represented a poor enticement and 5 represented a significant enticement. The survey concluded for non-WRC members at this juncture. WRC members however, were offered the opportunity to identify which areas of the center they frequented most during activity sessions, including: cardiovascular machines; resistance machines; free weights; recreational sports; rock wall; running track; swimming pool; group fitness classes; and personal training sessions.

In its entirety, the survey incorporated between fifteen and thirty-five questions depending on WRC membership status. The survey required approximately five to ten minutes to complete. Electronic consent forms attached to the Qualtrics platform preceded engagement in any survey response. The Qualtrics platform employees a privacy setting, ensuring all responses are confidential and anonymous, and are in no way identifiable.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics ($M \pm SD$) were calculated for all demographic and survey data. Demographic data included age, gender, faculty-staff designation, department, current fitness

level and WRC membership status. Survey data included Likert scale responses to satisfaction levels with current respective wellness facilities; satisfaction levels of potential promotional enticements related to the campus WRC; and current WRC member data regarding facility utilization. Data analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.

RESULTS

Of the responding employees, 18% were current members of the campus WRC. These participants rated their satisfaction with the various aspects of the WRC on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not satisfied at all and 5 being extremely satisfied with the aforementioned metrics. The amenities participants were most satisfied with included facility equipment, facility rules and policies, and access to parking; all with mean scores higher than 4.2. WRC members appeared relatively pleased with all remaining aspects of the WRC, where satisfaction scores ranged from 3.06 to 3.82 on the Likert scale. (See table 1). Moreover, current members identified cardiovascular machines, resistance machines, and free weights as areas most utilized in the WRC; with the track and pool consistently used; with the remaining amenities rarely used. (See table 2).

Table 1

WRC Member Satisfaction Survey

AREA OF SPECIFICITY	MEAN(*M)*	STANDARD DEVIATION*(SD)*
Membership Cost	3.76	1.21
Facility Hours	3.82	1.04
Available Amenities	3.24	1.44
Available Fitness Classes	3.06	1.55
Available Recreational Sports	3.53	1.33

Staff Support & Knowledge	3.65	1.08
Facility Equipment	4.18	0.78
Facility Rules & Policies	4.35	0.97
Parking	4.41	0.77

Table 2

WRC Member Facility Utilization

AREA OF SPECIFICITY	Member Usage(%)
Cardiovascular Machines	50%
Resistance Machines	50%
Free Weights	55%
Recreational Sports	10%
Rock Wall	0%
Running Track	35%
Swimming Pool	20%
Personal Training	10%

Of the responding employees, 30% were members of off-campus wellness centers. These participants rated their satisfaction with the various aspects of their respective wellness centers on the same scale as previously described. The amenities participants were most satisfied with included operational hours, fitness classes, staff support and knowledge, facility equipment, and facility rules and procedures; all with mean scores higher than 4.0. These employees also appeared relatively pleased with the membership cost, child care, and faculty/adult-only hours of their respective facilities; where satisfaction scores ranged from 3.55 to 3.75 on the Likert scale. However, this group was generally disappointed in their respective

facilities ability to offer amenities available at the campus WRC such as recreational sports and aquatics; where satisfaction scores ranged from 1.90 to 2.60 on the Likert scale. (See table 3)

Table 3

Off-Campus Member Satisfaction Survey

AREA OF SPECIFICITY	MEAN(*M*)	STANDARD DEVIATION*(SD)*
Membership Cost	3.75	1.09
Facility Hours	4.65	0.65
Available Amenities	1.90	1.48
Available Fitness Classes	4.20	0.87
Available Recreational Sports	2.60	1.46
Staff Support & Knowledge	4.25	0.83
Facility Equipment	4.20	0.98
Facility Rules & Policies	4.00	1.10
Child Care	3.55	1.77
Faculty/Adult Hours	3.60	1.56

Of the responding employees, 51% were not current members of any wellness center facility. In response to survey questions designed to determine which, if any, promotional offers would incentivize these employees to join the WRC, it was apparent that the provided options were unlikely to motivate these individuals. Of all offers, only the possibility of five free personal training sessions appeared to be of interest to non-members. All remaining offers appeared to have minimal motivational effect on enticing employees to join the WRC. (See table 4).

Table 4

Non-Member WRC Enticing Promotional Offers

AREA OF SPECIFICITY	MEAN(*M*)	STANDARD DEVIATION*(SD)*

Faculty Only Hours	2.62	1.55
Increased Weekend Hours	2.26	1.52
Early Opening Hours	2.50	1.58
Free Health Screenings	2.44	1.56
Five Personal Training Sessions	3.00	1.78
Online Equipment Instructional Videos	2.08	1.57
Contractually Allotted Workout Hours	2.94	1.75
Child Care	1.84	1.51
Increased Pool Hours	2.62	1.61
Accessible Parking	2.62	1.65

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze environmental, behavioral and logistical factors that affect employee usage of the campus WRC, in order to design a logistically and conceptually sound intervention action plan that would effectively promote a culture of wellness on campus among full-time employees. Based on data collected, there appear to be several realistic recommendations that can be considered in the development of this action plan.

Foremost, it appears that a lower membership fee would be incentivizing to a majority of employees. The current membership fee of twenty-five dollars per month was viewed as excessive to the majority of the members and non-members who partook in the survey. With significant citations in the literature base that healthy employees tend to be happier, more productive, and require less time off, it may be in the financial interest of a university to waive membership fees altogether.

Likewise, the limited operational hours of the WRC, particularly weekend, summer, and holiday hours, were viewed by many employees negatively. This was in contrast to employee

satisfaction rates with operational hours of off-campus facilities. Off-campus facilities were rated highest in the area of operational hours, largely due to their seven-day per week, twenty-four-hour per day, access. With the available current technology, the WRC possesses the potential to incorporate twenty-four-hour access, allowing for a schedule that will be enticing to members, offering them the flexibility required.

Additionally, the accrued data suggests that faculty and staff only hours may be influential recruiting mechanisms for new WRC employee members. It appears to be both intimidating and daunting for faculty members in particular to exercise in the presence of their students if they are out of shape, lack knowledge of gym etiquette, and lack familiarity with gym machinery and equipment. The potential for embarrassment may prevent interested employees from frequenting a campus WRC (Stankowskii, Trauntvein, & Hall, 2017). Similarly, faculty appear to be reluctant to exercise in close proximity to students due to issues associated with blurred relationship roles. Faculty tend to desire to refrain from fraternizing with students in any manner that can be construed as unprofessional in today's environment. This includes discussing course content, grades, and other academic material in a social setting such as a wellness center. (Stankowskii, Trauntvein, & Hall, 2017). If provided the opportunity to exercise uninterrupted, in an emotionally comfortable setting, employees appear to be more likely to do so.

Furthermore, the university may benefit from allotting a specific amount of time during the workday for utilization of the WRC by faculty and staff. Though this would require an initial financial investment, research suggests that the initial investment would reap a three to five-fold return through increased worker productivity and minimized associated healthcare costs. (Baicker, Culter, & Song, 2010; Kramer et al., 2015). Workplace interventions that provide access to physical exercise during work hours have also been shown to reduce problems

associated with “lack of time”, facilitating greater activity engagement among “low motivation” employees (Vilela, Silva, DeLira, & Andrade, 2015). Hence, the benefits of such an investment appear to significantly outweigh the costs.

Moreover, wellness center staff support and knowledge was a much higher rated amenity by members of off-campus wellness centers when compared to the on-campus WRC. This data suggests that the WRC should consider placing an increased emphasis on hiring and training proficient, knowledgeable, engaging role models for staff positions. Older adults with little knowledge of wellness center etiquette and equipment tend to be uncomfortable in such environments; and thereby avoid those settings. A friendly, knowledgeable staff member who is proactive with assisting new members, or trial members, tends to help build member confidence and self-esteem (Zarotis, 2018).

Finally, a limited number of free personal training sessions appears to be the most significant factor in recruiting new members to join a campus WRC. Employees stated that professional advice from a proficient trainer would be the most beneficial incentive. This is logically sound as the most significant deterrents to engagement in exercise within a wellness center typically relate to unfamiliarity with exercise equipment, lack of knowledge of facility rules and policies, insecurity with personal fitness levels, and fear of injury (Barte & Wendel-Vos, 2017). Each of the aforementioned can be easily remedied with a few initial personal training sessions, delivered by polite, competent professionals.

Incentives have been shown to be effective mechanisms for promoting membership recruitment of wellness centers. This study has identified six distinct measures that appear to have the potential to satisfy campus employee desires as they relate to engagement in exercise through a campus wellness center: 1) Low-cost or no-cost membership 2) Twenty-four-hour

access 3) Employee-only hours 4) Contractually allotted exercise time allocated in the workday 5) Proficiently trained fitness assistants and 6) Free introductory personal training sessions. The availability of the stated incentives has the potential to encourage utilization of a campus WRC, and may significantly advance a campus initiative to institute a "culture of wellness" among employees.

LIMITATIONS

Marginal, and unavoidable, limitations applied to this study. Foremost, as a case-study, data accrued in this study are representative of a small, Liberal Arts university in the southeastern United States; where data are difficult to generalize to other institutions. Furthermore, at the time of survey distribution, some potential participants may not have had the opportunity to participate. Moreover, due to the very nature of subjectivity that exists in a Likert scale, the range of satisfaction levels will always vary slightly based on individual perceptions of "satisfaction". Finally, the survey response rate was marginal. Where the limited data did allow for descriptive analyses, it precluded researches from running inferential parametric statistics.

Future studies would benefit from increasing survey response rates and expanding data collection to multiple universities of similar composition. In order to realistically facilitate programmatic change, fostering the desired "culture of wellness" on campuses among employees, a more comprehensive data set is required. Without a more comprehensive set of data, it will be too difficult to make any other realistic, generalizable recommendations other than those offered by the current study.

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