

The Role of University-Required Fitness Courses in Students' Health and Exercise Practices

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ABSTRACT

Lifetime fitness (LF) classes include exercise, sport, and recreational activity courses. The main purposes of LF classes are to give health education that elicits mental, social, and physical preparation for a lifelong experience of fitness. However, previous research has not extensively investigated the role of LF classes on students' motivations to exercise during and after completing the course. **PURPOSE:** To determine whether or not taking an LF class contributes to a student's motivation to exercise, to determine a motivation for signing up for an LF course, to determine why they chose that specific class, and to determine the degree to which an LF class effectively changes a student's view on exercise. **METHODS:** Male and female college students (n=183) were recruited from LF classes, including aerobic walking, aerobic running, volleyball, softball, strength training, golf, bowling, and fitness theory. At the beginning of the semester, a survey was given via Qualtrics that asked four open-ended questions about the students' views of LF classes. **RESULTS:** In response to the first question, "Why did you choose this LF course?", 30% of the students responded it was to play a fun sport. Other responses included to maintain a healthy lifestyle (15%), to continue to play a sport they played before the LF class (17%), or to learn how to play a new sport (17%). The second question asked, "Why are you taking an LF course?", and 87% of the students responded it was required. The other 13% responded they took it for fun, or they wanted to take it with a friend. The third question asked, "Why do you think Baylor requires you to take an LF class?". 86% of the students felt that Baylor requires LF classes for the well-being of students, while 14% were not sure why or believed it was for monetary purposes. The final question asked, "What is your motivation for exercising, both in an LF and outside of class?" To this question, 98% of participants responded saying their motivation was to maintain health or for fun, social reasons. The other 2% responded saying their motivation was a GPA boost. **CONCLUSIONS:** When asked why students are taking an LF class, the majority of students indicated they did so for reasons from a negative approach. However, when asked about exercise motivation as a whole, the majority of the students indicated reasons for wanting to exercise from a positive approach. The disparity between answers given for these two questions may indicate a motivational distinction between LF classes and exercise in general. Therefore, further research exploring the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations between exercise and LF classes is warranted.