

Is Our Student Body Fit? A Comparison of Current Fitness Levels to Normative Data

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ABSTRACT

Physical Activity (PA) among university students yields 40-50% participation and this statistic continues to make a steady decline. This has caused a widespread call to action for universities to provide resources and education to encourage students to increase physical activity. Prior to and during COVID-19 pandemic our student body reported decreased levels of PA. Amid the return to an in-person student life, many students have reported increased challenges in returning to fitness related activities. In tandem with our Exercise is Medicine-On Campus (EIM-OC) initiative, an interactive health fair open to the entire body of 4,495 students was held to address current physical fitness levels. **PURPOSE:** To examine physical fitness levels of students upon return to instruction practices for the 2021-2022 academic year. **METHODS:** Just 4% (N=220) of Barry's students attended the health fair. Only 16% (N=37) completed some form of fitness testing, and only 10 (6 female, 4 male; age 24.3 ± 9.3) completed all 5 physical fitness assessments (i.e. muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, body composition, cardiorespiratory endurance). Participants' data were compared to normative data for their corresponding gender and age to assess current fitness level. **RESULTS:** Male and female participants overall excelled in cardiovascular fitness and muscular endurance, while body composition, flexibility and muscle strength ranged from fair to average. Females exhibited normal or average classifications across 4 of the 5 areas of testing. Males exhibited good classifications for body fat % and flexibility, and an excellent classification for muscular strength. **CONCLUSION:** Sample's overall fitness levels were considered average to above average, but the small sample size does not allow for valid inferences. However, even though it was not the purpose of this study, the data collected highlight an important co-existing issue between college exercise education programs and their efficiency in marketing to their audience. Students were offered an abundance of free giveaways and other incentives for this event, yet the yield was only 4% of the student body. Further research is needed to determine the most effective forms of garnering increased participation in on-campus exercise education programs.