The Status of Small Group Training as Perceived by Program Administrators

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The Status of Small Group Training as Perceived by Program Administrators
The Status of Small Group Training as Perceived by Program Administrators

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Kinesiology

by

Jade Dworkin
University of Florida
Bachelor of Science in Applied Physiology and Kinesiology, 2013

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University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

This descriptive study was obtain program components and administrative perceptions of collegiate recreation small group training programs. Through an extensive review of literature and valued input from key campus recreation professionals, a preliminary survey with 30 items was created. The preliminary survey, Administrative Effectiveness of Small Group Training Programs Survey (AESGTPS), was administered electronically to collegiate recreation small group training program directors. Research questions investigated were identifying ways in which various program components may vary from institution to institution, identifying program components that were perceived to be contributing to perceived program effectiveness, and defining ways in which program administrators perceived program effectiveness. Participants included thirteen small and 24 large NIRSA member institutions in the United States. Data collected included institutional, program, and staff components. Program, facility space, and marketing outcomes were also investigated. Small Group Training programs could potentially be more popular in certain areas of the country. More funding, students, larger diverse populations, and resources could be a great factor as to why larger schools tend to have specialized programs such as small group training. Most popular class types were Boot Camp and TRX classes. Six-to-eight week long classes were the most frequently reported registration style. Class management techniques were reported as the most important component of staff training. Larger schools were more likely than smaller schools to have studios dedicated to small group training. Profitability was not perceived to be an outcome of administering small group training. Social Media was the most frequently reported form of marketing within collegiate recreation. Mind/body is a growing trend in the fitness and wellness industry and could fit well
into the small group training program. The results have implications in providing program administrators with a resource for designing, planning, and implementing small group training programs.
Acknowledgements

Special thanks are extended to several key individuals that helped make this thesis bloom from an idea to a reality.

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I sincerely appreciate all that Dr. Katie Helms has done to keep my thesis topic closely connected to the outcomes and findings that I was looking to obtain from my research. No stone was left unturned regarding survey design. I value her skill in developing framework for assessment tools in the campus recreation setting.

Hannah Dial has served as my undergraduate research assistant and I am so glad that she accepted the offer to help with data collection. Thank you, Hannah, for all of your hard work and best of luck when you write your thesis in graduate school!

I commend all of the institutions and campus recreation professionals that participated in the survey administered. Without their responses, this project would have not had any findings.
Dedication

The Status of Small Group Training as Perceived by Program Administrators

is dedicated to all fitness and wellness professionals, especially in the field of collegiate recreation. These professionals work tirelessly to ensure the daily operations of their comprehensive fitness and wellness programs. They maintain knowledge of current fitness trends and constantly strive to provide cutting-edge programming to their campuses. With creativity and knowledge of their intended populations, these fitness and wellness professionals create programs that aid in developing healthier and productive people thorough physical pursuits. Small Group Training programs represent another way to reach more individuals looking to improve their quality of life with expert instruction.

On a more personal note, Darcie Burde and Casey Fant deserve honorable dedication of this thesis for embodying the aforementioned characteristics of truly influential fitness and wellness professionals. I consider both of these women to be my lifelong mentors, pioneers in the fitness/wellness industry, and cherished friends. Without their influence and guidance, I would not be where I am today.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Frame of Reference

During college, students join various organizations and engage in activities that comprise their leisure time. Many of the habits formed in college play a pivotal role throughout one’s life. Research suggests “that the more physically active individuals are in their leisure time as adolescents and young adults, the more likely they are to remain active throughout their lifespan” (Kozechian, Heidary, Saiah and Heidary, 2012). This study states that one area of recreation is the growing field of student campus (collegiate) recreation.

Collegiate recreation programs consist of several offerings including formal and informal recreation opportunities. These opportunities include but are not limited to intramural sports, sport clubs, outdoor recreation, aquatics, and fitness programs. Collegiate recreation typically stands in line with the university it is governed by, sharing similar vision and mission statements. Education remains as a continuous theme between the two entities that aims to enhance the student experience and to prepare students for the future. Over the past several years, higher learning institutions have invested in recreation facilities that directly link to the education theme. Fitness is one of the most popular program areas within collegiate recreation. Comprehensive fitness programs may offer group fitness, personal training, small group training, fitness assessments, wellness programs, massage therapy, and strength and conditioning.

Small Group Training is a relatively new concept within the fitness industry and collegiate recreation fitness programming. Small Group Training “presents the opportunity for people to experience the benefits of the creativity and motivation of a trainer while lowering the financial entry point and/or spending more time with the trainer for the available funds”
(American Council on Exercise, 2012). In collegiate recreation, small group training exemplifies a unique opportunity to explore an emerging dimension of fitness by blending group fitness with personal training. Small Group Training offers classes that focus on a specialized format, individualized progression and skill development.

Since its inception, small group training has been one of the American College of Sports Medicine Top 20 fitness trends (ACSM, 2015). This hybrid format for collegiate recreation fitness programming has been sprouting up at several higher learning institutions over the past few years and continues to expand across the country. Each collegiate recreation program operates differently and has diverse populations to serve, which allude to a large fluctuation in how each small group training program functions.

**Statement of the Problem**

With small group training being a new hybrid fitness modality, limited research was found on the topic. Collegiate recreation professionals overseeing the small group training program often struggle with establishing program design elements that are known to be effective. Informal collaboration efforts exist within the National Intramural Sports Association (NIRSA), International Dance and Exercise Association (IDEA), and various fitness/wellness distribution channels.

A great deal of diversity exists in the way that small group training programs are offered. Class types, session formats, and pricing structures vary greatly. There is a need to systematically study this program in a research context. Collegiate recreation and fitness industry professionals will then be able to better quantify and qualify data supporting effective small group training programming. With this knowledge, program directors will be more
cognizant of what works to allow their program incorporate the themes of effectiveness, success and how to better meet their participant’s needs.

This study examined the status of small group training as perceived by program administrators by analyzing collegiate recreation programs offering small group training at small and large four-year NIRSA member institutions in the United States. The purpose of this study was to investigate which small group training program characteristics were most associated with perceived program success among program administrators.

**Research Questions**

This descriptive study tested the following three research questions that have been formulated from a review of literature to make predictions about the outcome of the study:

1. Identify ways in which various program components may vary from institution to institution (regional difference, size of institution difference, etc.).

2. Identify program components that are perceived to be contributing to perceived program effectiveness.

3. Define ways in which program administrators perceive program effectiveness.

**Operational Definitions**

The following terms and definitions were used in this study:

- **Small Group Training:** Small Group Training offers a unique opportunity to explore an emerging dimension of fitness by blending Group Fitness with Personal Training. Small Group Training offers classes that focus on a specialized format, individualized progression, and skill development.

- **Perception:** Perceptions exemplify quick, acute, and intuitive recognitions of the stimulus present.
• Effective: In terms of measuring small group training program effectiveness, the program had an intended effect; producing a result that is desired.

• NIRSA: National Intramural Recreational Sports Association. As college and university students develop into future leaders, NIRSA members support their learning and growth by fostering lifelong habits of wellbeing. Leadership, teamwork, dedication, and respect are among the many skills exercised by inclusive competition, fitness, and recreation. Since its founding in 1950, NIRSA membership has grown to comprise nearly 4,000 dedicated professionals, students, and businesses, serving an estimated 7.7 million students (nirsa.org).

• NIRSA Member Institutions: Universities affiliated with the National Intramural Recreational Sports Association (nirsa.org).

• Small Four-Year Institutions: 19,999 or less students enrolled.

• Large Four-Year Institutions: 20,000 or more students enrolled.

Assumptions

The assumptions for this study included the honesty and integrity of the information received from small group training program directors, current NIRSA member institutional classification, and marketing information specifically to promote the small group training program. It was assumed that the small group training program directors have worked in their current position at their institution for at least six months.

Limitations

Limitations for this study included the self-reporting, validity, and reliability of small group training and marketing campaign information. Data was collected from a Qualtrics survey to assess the administrative effectiveness of small group training programs. This survey was
administered to small group training program directors which assessed the current state of their program through several characteristics outlined in the methodology section. With this design, a bias exists that could skew the results of the research findings.

Information about marketing the small group training programs was collected via Qualtrics in the same survey regarding program quality. It was expected that responders had this information available to them or that they could obtain the requested information from the relevant professional working in their collegiate recreation program. Each responder received the survey but responded at different times of the day which could account for shortened and lengthened responses to survey questions. It is also possible that not all responders were native English speakers which could have impacted the comprehension and responses received.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations of this study comprising the data included small and large four-year NIRSA member institutions that had a campus recreation small group training program in the United States. The small group training program directors have worked in their current position for their institution for at least six months. The time frame of data collection was January-February 2015.

**Purpose of the Study**

The schools for this study were chosen strategically because they had a small group training program currently operating under the collegiate recreation department as a fitness program offering. Offering this program at higher learning institutions provides an opportunity for students and patrons to have a lower financial entry point to receive a more personalized fitness and wellness experience in a camaraderie-oriented environment. This program was designed with the intention to reach an underrepresented population that typically do not prefer
to engage in other campus recreation program offerings such as personal training, group fitness, or intramural sports.

With more knowledge on this topic, collegiate recreation programs will have innovative ideas and information to meet the needs of their members and keep up with the trends of the ever-changing fitness industry. The purpose of this study investigated which small group training program characteristics were most associated with perceived program success among program administrators.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Small Group Training Programs within the Collegiate Recreation Setting

Collegiate recreation departments are a prime setting for small group training programs for a variety of reasons. With a more sophisticated skill set required by the instructor and the essential to provide an experience is a compulsory differentiation of small group training from other elements of fitness program offerings. Due to small group training gaining popularity and recognition, patrons are drawn to the hybrid program because “it’s an affordable, fun way for clients to take advantage of a trainer’s expertise at a lower financial investment—all while keeping the fun and competitiveness of a group dynamic” (American Council on Exercise, 2012). Patrons are beginning to understand what small group training is comprised of and how it differs from personal training and group fitness.

Research supports that campus recreation positively affects students. Seventy-five percent of students report that participating in campus recreation activities and programs has expanded their interest in staying fit and healthy (Forrester, 2014). Providing individualized opportunities that attract students to adopt a healthy lifestyle will only benefit them in the future. Ninety percent of students attributed fitness as an outcome to their participation in campus recreation facilities and programs (Forrester, 2014). With fitness being an important outcome to students’ participation in campus recreation programs, educating and promoting wellness with a small group training program in place is beneficial. In regards to structured training programs such as personal training, only 17% of campus recreation participants report using personal training services (Forrester, 2014). Group Fitness is the most popular structured campus recreation program, with 32% of participants attending at least one class per semester (Forrester,
2014). Small Group Training participation may fall between personal training and group fitness. This supports the idea that small group training could be a good bridging program combining elements of personal training and group fitness.

**Exercise within a Group Setting**

Several positive outcomes relate to exercising in a group setting as contrasted with an individual setting. Current research suggests many instances that individuals prefer to exercise in a group setting. Burke et al (2006) found that 601 undergraduate students between the ages of 19 and 25 identified exercising alone as the least preferred context (43.5%). Numerous intrapersonal qualities and interpersonal components support an individual’s preference to exercise in a group setting.

**Self-efficacy.** Cohesion is considered to be a process that connects a group, keeps them together, and satisfies members’ affective needs while working towards an instrumental objective (Burke, Carron, & Shapcott, 2008). Numerous studies have shown that perceptions about the cohesiveness of an exercise group impacts whether or not individual members adhere to the group (Burke, Carron, & Shapcott, 2008). Exercising in a group has been found to influence self-efficacy and intentions to be physically active (Hogg and Williams, 2000). Exercise self-efficacy, general wellbeing, and exercise adherence were all positively correlated in a ten-week of twice-weekly yoga intervention (Bryan, Zipp, and Parasher, 2012). Sixty-eight percent of students that participate in campus recreation facilities or programs report an increase in their sense of belonging/association with their campus and 66% report an increase in their ability to develop friendships (Forrester, 2014). Physically challenging experiences may strengthen cooperation amongst group members (Bastian et. al, 2014). Carron, Widmeyer, and Brawley’s (1985) conceptual model of cohesion has been applied as a framework for
conceptualizing cohesion in the fitness and exercise setting. The cohesion model suggests that the cognitions that members hold about the cohesiveness of their group relate to perceiving the group as a team (Spink et al., 2014). With a team-oriented approach, self-efficacy appears to increase.

**Decision making and motivation.** Tapping into the needs and goals of Small Group Training participants can extend beyond a physical change. Tenenbaum et al. (2013) states “people make decisions about anything in their immediate environment in order to adapt to it, and satisfy their biological and social needs”. Additionally, Wilson et al (2004) state “many people engage in behaviors that they feel are important but are not inherently interesting, stimulating or enjoyable”. In order to appeal to future participants, the Small Group Training program needs to be social, motivating, and fun.

**Adherence.** Adherence to group activities can be affected by the individual’s perception of those activities meeting personal needs and objectives. This finding has presented in several adherence outcomes including, but not limited to, attendance (Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1988), dropout (Spink & Carron, 1994), and lateness (Spink & Carron, 1993). Young adults’ adherence to group fitness classes can be affected by the individual’s perception of these classes meeting personal needs and objectives (Spink and Carron, 1994). Older adults adhere to group fitness classes when they display a positive attitude and expectations have been fulfilled (Spink and Carron, 1994). This could suggest that satisfying personal needs and objectives is most strongly associated with adherence in a structured exercise environment (Annesi, 1999). A variety of group dynamic principles such as partner work, group goal setting, and strategies to enhance communication/interaction aim to increase cohesion and adherence (Burke et. al, 2006).
Team building exemplifies helping the group increase effectiveness, satisfy the needs of its members, or improve work conditions. In the exercise context, team building is typically measured in its ability to enhance participants’ adherence through increased perceptions of group cohesion (Brawley and Paskevich, 1997). Perceptions of group cohesion are positively related to exercise adherence (Carron, Widmeyer, and Brawley, 1988). Social support is connected to older adults’ attitudes, increases in self-efficacy, and promotion of long-term adherence (McAuley et. al, 2003). Adherence to a university fitness center exercise program was significantly positively related to social interaction (Ryan et. al., 1997). Factors contributing to cohesiveness and adherence in the collegiate recreation small group training setting need to be investigated further.

**Specific Program Elements**

For campus recreation programs to be effective, there are an array of program elements that need to be examined. According to the American Council on Exercise (2012), an effective small group training program has fewer than ten participants and the instructor does not exercise with the clients. This class size aims to be fun, high quality and the coach has the ability to correctly supervise movement and extrinsically motivate the participants. The typical time frame for most Small Group Training programs would ideally be around four to six weeks, allowing the participant to commit without schedule conflicts and still have enough time to see measurable progress. This study examined staff qualifications and training, marketing, service quality, facilities, and program structure.

**Staff qualifications and training.** Fitness industry standards attempt to protect the public from harm through the way of certifications. For small group training instructors, possessing a nationally recognized fitness certification is often compulsory for employment.
Professional credentials can play a crucial role in setting a standard of excellence by assuring educator competency, building credibility, and demonstrating commitment to ongoing professional development (Myers, 2015). With professional credentials, trust between the instructor and participant can be potentially maximized. Small Group Training instructors can be sparse and effective instructors connect well with the participant and retain them in the program. If the small group training instructor’s charisma and/or creation of a positive experience are missing, it may be difficult for the program to be profitable and sustainable. The instructor’s leadership often surfaces as an important trait in personally mentoring their class participants to stay committed to small group training (American Council on Exercise, 2012).

In the rehabilitation setting, patients in clinical exercise programs had higher adherence when they received clarifying information from their exercise program supervisor (Medina-Mirapeix, et al., 2009). This study supports the notion that participants felt more connected and adherent to their exercise program when their questions are answered clearly and confidently.

Continuing education focusing on specific topics that may not be covered in detail by the certification allows the fitness professional to effect more change with their participants. Specifically, motivational training has been shown to increase participants’ fitness class attendance, especially in the first three months (Hawley-Hague, 2014). An inclusive environment also becomes significant for individuals exercising in a group. The group members need to feel a sense of belonging and ease with the environment often created by the fitness instructor. Effective instructors create an environment for learning, communicate well, provide direct instruction, and feedback (Heidorn and Welch, 2010). This attractive inclusive environment also promotes good customer service.
Customer service elements, including staff responsiveness and information provision were positively associated with intent to re-purchase fitness center memberships (Ferrand, 2010). For a specific program like small group training, credentials, inclusivity, and superior customer service could contribute to its effectiveness within the scope of collegiate recreation.

The effectiveness of many programs comprises leadership and organizational culture. Weese (1996) states that leadership and organizational culture are advertised as two of the most important factors in determining the success of an enterprise. This study found that culture strength significantly correlated with organizational effectiveness in the collegiate recreation field. With small group training, leadership and organizational culture are important factors to consider when examining the perceptive effectiveness of the program.

Marketing. Within collegiate recreation, marketing is becoming a vital component of bringing information to students’ fingertips through social media and traditional methods. Marketing encompasses customer management, creating value, and establishing meaningful interactions (Grönroos, 2009). Marketing is a prominent way to influence behavior and stimulate sales (Basch et al., 2015). For collegiate recreation, programs need to be effectively developed and expertly marketed to a campus community if they want to be successful (Weese, 1997). In this study, it is stated that program directors must ensure that their program offerings are expertly conceived, promoted, staged, and evaluated if their programs are to survive in a competitive market. Since small group training is such a specialized fitness program offering, careful consideration and planning needs to be ensured to promote survival and sustainability of the program.

Within the scope of marketing in collegiate recreation, creating satisfaction becomes important to encourage participants to continue participation in the small group training program.
Creating satisfaction from the buyer’s perspective encompasses several key traits. Cambra and Polo (2008) propose a conceptual model of four components governing satisfaction: cooperation, communication, adaptation to expectations, and trust. This study states that when investing in its image and in communication, this image must be sincere and adjust to the firm’s real situation. In addition, “making promises that the supplier is not certain to keep can be extremely dangerous…failure to keep promises will affect the potential continuity of the relationship, the suppliers image and reputation in the market and, the credibility of further commercial communication actions”. When marketing a small group training program, program directors need to be confident in their ability to follow through with all of the content advertised. For example, if a free pre and post fitness assessment is included with small group training registration, it is ultimately the responsibility of the program director to follow through and deliver this promised product. If this product is not mentioned and delivered to participants after they register, this could negatively impact their intentions to resign with the small group training program. In regards to creating satisfaction, several key components become important to the buyer (participant) of the product (small group training) of which the seller (program director) needs to be aware of.

Understanding intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation are significant components for effective marketing of the Small Group Training program. Vlachpoulos et al. (2011) defines intrinsic motivation as fun, pleasurable and satisfaction derived, extrinsic motivation as satisfying an external demand, and amotivation as lacking intention. Marketing campaigns need to envision each of these types of motivations for their future program participants. Just as learning styles differ, so do motivation styles. Marketing for small group training might
encompass class advertisements that appeal to the novice exerciser and the seasoned exerciser to meet their needs with class echelons to differentiate their levels of fitness.

Small Group Training presents an opportunity for more intense marketing strategies for collegiate recreation participants—marketing strategies for short-term involvement and longer-term loyalty may be different (Park, 1996). Due to small group training being such a specialized program typically offered during the academic year, intensified marketing strategies need to be applied. Among various collegiate recreation program offerings, participants feel less informed regarding small group training than more traditional programs such as intramural sports or swim lessons (University Recreation, 2014). Promotion of the small group training program needs to be aggressive and continuous to educate less informed collegiate recreation participants.

Service quality. Several dimensions need to be considered when developing and implementing a collegiate recreation small group training program. Obtaining feedback from program participants is crucial and “based upon the feedback from customers, practitioners can reframe their management strategies and tactics to redesign their service delivery system… the efforts to improve service quality may increase customer satisfaction and the level of consumer loyalty, and it can provide the opportunity for sport leaders to stay competitive in a currently saturated market environment” (Ko and Pastore, 2005). With reliable and valid assessment protocols in place, service quality can be better assessed.

Utilizing reliable and valid assessments also allows for programs to determine areas of improvement, which could impact the effectiveness of the program. The Service Quality Assessment Scale (SQAS) applied in the health—fitness setting allows the top management to “simply examine the mean service—quality score of each factor of the SQAS to determine the area of improvement” (Lam, Zhang and Jensen, 2005). Measuring the participant’s experience
and perception can allow for more insight into the small group training program. In this study, only perceived effectiveness from the small group training program director was assessed.

**Facilities.** The components of collegiate recreation facilities are important to consider. Collegiate recreation facilities comprise fitness centers, fields, courts, aquatics complexes, outdoor venues, and many more structures that may not be conventionally perceived. These facilities encompass several features such as a running track, climbing wall, spa, juice bar, fitness center, multipurpose courts, and many more. In addition to these facility features, various administrative and maintenance areas exist such as external grounds, control desks, laundry areas, and locker rooms (Tharrett and Peterson, 1997). The characteristics of recreational facilities are determinants of facility use and physical activity (Lee et al., 2013). Collegiate recreation facilities are influential when a student is continuing to attend a specific college/university. Seventy-four percent of students report that campus recreation facilities influenced their decisions to continue attending their chosen college/university (Forrester, 2014). Collegiate recreation facilities could be an important consideration and component of small group training programming.

**Program structure.** The way that a small group training program is designed comprises many facets. From session length to attendance, every aspect needs to be carefully considered. For participants of the small group training program, adherence outcomes need a certain amount of time to become visible. Previously inactive and insufficiently active participants experienced significant increases in moderate and vigorous physical activity from baseline to eight weeks and progress was maintained six months after the program concluded (Estabrooks et al., 2008). Cohesion is often assessed early in an exercise program but generally does not surface till the later weeks of the exercise program, where positive affect is influenced (Courneya, 1995). Four-
to-six week section length is ideal because it allows people to set measurable progress but it is short enough for most people to avoid conflicts (American Council on Exercise, 2012). When programming the session length of a small group training program, a four-to-six week model might promote effectiveness and measurable success of participants. The current study examined session length. In terms of attendance, it is important for small group training participants to attend their sessions…the frequency of attendance had a positive impact on intent to renew membership at a fitness center (Ferrand, 2010). Keeping in consistent contact with small group training participants might help with their intentions to continue to participate in the program. Creating a program structure that promotes effective communication and consistent attendance among small group training instructors and their participants could potentially impact program retention rates.

Summary

A review of literature has documented the significant need for research to identify effective components and outcomes of small group training programs. If these small group training programs are enhanced and/or implemented in collegiate recreation, it will likely increase participant buy-in, revenue, and awareness of the program on the campus. If success and effectiveness can be pinpointed more clearly, best practices will be able to be replicated and augmented at several institutions.

Personal Training and Group Fitness have both been suggested to be effective and successful fitness programs for achieving fitness goals and meeting the participant(s) where they need to be met. Considering the recentness of this trend, however, few program components have been identified as contributing to the perception of small group training program success and effectiveness.
Chapter Three

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a descriptive design to examine the status of small group training as perceived by program administrators.

Participants

Participants included a thorough search of the population of large and small four-year NIRSA member institutions in the United States. The selection of institutions was determined by examining collegiate recreation websites. If these websites appeared to offer small group training or a similar program that had a different title (i.e. instructional programs, specialized classes, etc.), they were included in the initial stage of the study. Further criteria included small group training program directors have worked in their current position for their institution for at least six months. The researcher obtained appropriate approval of subjects from the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board prior to the study.

An e-mail was sent out individually to select small group training program directors (as determined by the collegiate recreation website search) during January to February 2015. This e-mail included institutional review board approval, a brief description of the study, and a link to the Qualtrics Administrative Effectiveness of Small Group Training Programs survey (AESGTPS). In order to increase the response rate, the email was sent out twice to ensure increased participation. Electronic consent was obtained from each participant prior to their participation in the study. Program directors that did not meet the study requirements or felt that their program was not accurately reflected in the criteria required were excluded from participation in the study.
Measures

**Institutional characteristics.** Participants were asked to provide information about which NIRSA region their institution is a member of, the size of their institution approximated by university enrollment categorized in numerical categories (large four-year or small four-year).

**Program characteristics.** Participants were administered the Administrative Effectiveness of Small Group Training Programs survey (AESGTPS) which measured class type(s), staff, program format, facility/equipment, marketing, and program outcomes. The program format encompassed how small group training operates at each institution.

**Administrative outcomes.** The administrative outcomes included cost, structure, and marketing strategy. The AESGTPS asked questions categorically (class types, yes/no), descriptively (perceptions, rating scale), quantitatively (estimate approximate participation, percentages), and qualitatively (program administrators described various program aspects in their own words).

**Procedures**

Permission from small group training program directors was obtained prior to data collection. Each small group training program directors’ consent was obtained once they followed the AESGTPS link administered electronically via Qualtrics.

**Data Analysis**

Data were collected regarding the NIRSA region their institution was a member of, the size of their institution approximated by university enrollment classified as large four-year or small four-year, an approximation of how many participants were enrolled in small group training per semester, popular class types, staff certification requirements, class registration process, facility/equipment, and marketing information.
Data was analyzed utilizing Qualtrics Data Management software. Demographic information obtained was summarized using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics were also used to analyze frequencies and cross-tabulations of program components. Class types, session duration, and marketing strategies were a few of the program components that were analyzed.

Qualitative data management was used to analyze program administrator perceptions of program effectiveness and program descriptions which were coded into meta-data in order to identify and investigate patterns.

Quantitative data management was utilized via Microsoft Excel to summarize information such as average price, average mean difference scores and standard deviations using a five-point Likert type scale. This scale was composed of 1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= neither disagree nor agree; 4= agree; 5= strongly agree. Data were coded to analyze average mean difference scores and standard deviations.

**Threats to Internal Validity**

Possible threats to internal validity for this study included that there was selection bias (no random assignment), the history of small group training is novel and is still expanding, the survey was only administered once, attrition (bias) of response, and contamination. The dropout rate of several participants occurred due to partial or no participation in the survey. Confounding variables (i.e. sleep, diet, exercise, motivation of the participants) were also threats to internal validity.

**Threats to External Validity**

A threat to external validity for this study included that the small sample size may not be generalizable to the entire collegiate recreational small group training program population. A
more robust sample size of large four-year and small four-year institutions could be more representative of the study to the collegiate recreational small group training program population. In addition, the Hawthorne Effect, where participants know that they were a part of a research study and were experiencing it could be another threat to external validity.
Chapter Four

Results

Participants included in the population were four-year NIRSA member institutions in the United States offering a small group training program. The approximate university enrollment allowed for the sample to differentiate between small and large classification. The Administrative Effectiveness of Small Group Training Programs survey (AESGTPS) was distributed to 100 four-year institutions with 13 schools classified as small and 87 schools classified as large. Very few small schools were found to have a small group training program. Thirty-seven surveys were returned for a response rate of 37%. Several participants were not included in the sample after clarifying through e-mail that their institution did not fully reflect the components of a small group training program.

The distribution of NIRSA regional classification indicated a geographically representative sample. The small group training program directors surveyed were understood to have worked in their current position at their institution for at least six months. Appropriate approval of subjects from the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board and electronic consent was obtained from each participant prior to participation in the study. Several elements of small group training programs were analyzed in detail to further examine specific characteristics and relationships that contributed to program administrators’ perception of successful and effective programs.

Institutional Characteristics

Participants were asked to provide information about which NIRSA region their institution was a member. Figure 1 shows this distribution.
Figure 1  NIRSA Region Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NIRSA Region</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Region I</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region II</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region III</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region IV</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region V</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region VI</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 delineates which states fall under the aforementioned regions, comprising a geographically representative sample.

Figure 2  NIRSA Regions

The approximate university enrollment was obtained to determine four-year small and large institution classification. Five percent of institutions had below 5,000 students enrolled
full-time. Five percent of institutions had 5,000-9,999 students enrolled full-time. Eleven percent of institutions had 10,000-19,999 students enrolled full-time. Thirty percent of institutions had 20,000-29,999 students enrolled full-time. Forty-nine percent of institutions had 30,000 and above students enrolled full-time. In sum for this population sampled, 21% were classified as small institutions (under 19,999 students enrolled) and 79% were classified as large institutions (over 20,000 students enrolled). Figure 3 comprises this data. Larger schools were more likely to have small group training programs. This might suggest that larger schools tend to have more funding, students, and resources to offer small group training programs.

**Figure 3  Approximate University Enrollments at Four-Year Institutions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 5,000</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000-9,999</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-19,999</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000-29,999</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30,000 and above</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Program Characteristics**

Following are characteristics of various elements of small group training program structures, including class types, participant makeup, program format, and cost.

**Class types.** Participants were asked to provide class types that their program currently offers. Out of all of the responses received, three class types were offered the most frequently. Boot Camp classes are currently offered at 76% of institutions. Total Resistance Exercise (TRX) is currently offered at 65% of institutions. Running and walking classes are currently offered at 43% of institutions. Figure 4 details the distribution of classes that are currently offered.
Included among “other” class types were: Heart Rate monitored classes, Inversion Yoga, DanceFit, Cycling, Weights for Women, Krav Maga, Weight Loss, Tabata, Foam Roll and Release, Golf Conditioning, TRX Yoga, CrossFit, Les Mills GRIT, Boxing, Barre, Indo Board Yoga, Boxfit, Abmazing, Muay Thai, Tai Chi, Hip Hop, Salsa/Bachata, Argentine Tango, Karate, Acro Yoga, and Yoga Arm Balances.

**Cost.** The class prices ranged from complimentary to $35. For specialized classes such as the Pilates reformer, price per class ranged from $17 to $35. 78% of classes were between $2 and $10 per class.

**Small Group Training Program Participants.** Program administrators were asked to identify various participant demographics. Small Group Training program participants were comprised of 57% new and 50% returning. In addition, the participant’s membership classification was estimated. The most common type of Small Group Training program
participants were undergraduate students at 50.32% and faculty/staff at 37.94%. Figure 5 delineates more classifications of Small Group Training program participants.

![Figure 5 Small Group Training Program Participants Classifications](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Classification</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate students</td>
<td>50.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty/Staff</td>
<td>37.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate students</td>
<td>14.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Populations</td>
<td>14.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International students</td>
<td>11.36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Session length. Session length is a program element that administrators can manipulate that varies among programs. As previously mentioned in the review of literature, group cohesion is influential to exercise adherence. The current study examined Small Group Training program administrators’ perceptions of adherence as it relates to program length. It was hypothesized that program components were perceived to be contributing to perceived program effectiveness.

Survey participants were asked to indicate which type of session structures applies to their Small Group Training program. Fifty-four percent of institutions utilized the model of participants registering for a six-to-eight week packaged session of multiple classes. Forty-six percent of institutions indicated that participants registered for a three-to-five week packaged session of multiple classes. Figure 6 shows the Small Group Training program class registration methods.
When registering for a class/section, 81% of program participants were restricted to registering for a specific class type, day, and time. Nineteen percent were able to attend a variety of class types, days, and times. Most classes met one to three times per week depending on the class chosen. Eighty-four percent of programs had in-person registration at the campus recreation center, 51% offered online registration, and 14% offered other registration formats (free/drop in, mail in, by phone, none required). Several survey respondents provided elaboration if their program’s registration method was not accurately reflected in the aforementioned registration methods. Interestingly, most individuals stick to the times they registered for however, there is flexibility to participate in another time if needed. Differences in program retention according to session length were not enough to be significant, $\chi^2 = 6.19$, $p = .91$. This could be due to a small sample size.

**Staff Characteristics**

**Staff Credentials.** Qualifications and perceptions regarding the small group training instructor were also examined as an important element that potentially contributed to perceptive effectiveness. Providing small group training programs requires significant effort and financial investments in developing staff quality. Program administrators were asked to provide information about the types of certifications (if any) that small group training instructors were required to have in order to teach classes. Professional credentials were found to be imperative
to staffing small group training programs. Nearly all program administrators required small group training instructors to have a nationally recognized and accredited fitness certification. These certifications encompassed personal training, group fitness, or a combination of the two types, indicating the employee’s versatile skill set. If the small group training instructor was teaching a specialized class such as TRX, CrossFit, Olympic Lifting, Pilates Reformer, or Les Mills GRIT, they were required to have that equipment’s respective certification. The majority of respondents also reported CPR, First Aid, and AED being a mandatory requirement for risk management purposes.

**Staff Skills/Competencies.** Over the course of the school year, a variety of topics were found to be important for small group training instructors to receive as part of in-service or cross training. Surprisingly, class management was reported to be the most important topic. Working with special populations such as older adults and the disabled was also found to be a significant topic to cover. Reviewing exercise science was not highly regarded as being important. Other categories included concepts of progression, class/participant goals, inclusivity, how to “sell yourself” and “sell the program”, body image/eating disorder education/sensitivity, and facility operations protocols. These results suggest that more emphasis needs to be put on class management techniques during staff trainings.

**Staff Training.** Program administrators were asked to approximate the number of hours of job-specific training/in-service that small group training instructors received from campus recreation staff over the course of a school year. In addition to requiring a nationally accredited fitness certification, program directors also commonly spent over six hours of training per school year. Several respondents provided a range of approximated hours of staff training which fell into more than one category shown in figure 7.
**Staff Pay Scale.** The wage rates for small group training instructors varied from $7.50 to $37.50. The mean wage rate was $16 per hour. Two institutions provided a range for specific types of coaches/instructors (i.e. Pilates Reformer instructors) that fell into more than one category. It can be gleaned from these findings that small group training instructors possess a hybrid set of skills that are paid a comparable amount to group fitness instructors.

**Facility Characteristics**

**Dedicated studio space.** Adequate facility space for all activities was a common challenge for many collegiate recreation departments. Program directors were asked if their institution utilized a dedicated studio space for small group training programming. Sixty-two percent of small group training programs reported having a dedicated studio space. Seventy-two percent of schools with 30,000 or more students reported a dedicated studio space for small group training while only 18% of schools with less than 30,000 reported having a dedicated studio space. A Chi Square analysis was used to cross-tabulate program characteristics and studio space provision. It was hypothesized that program components such as a dedicated studio space were perceived to be contributing to perceived program effectiveness. Programs with dedicated studio space were more likely to describe adequate space for Small Group Training activities, $\chi^2 = 11.39; p = 0.02$. Dedicated studio space has implications related to positive customer service experience and environment. Average mean difference scores and standard
deviations were calculated regarding the dedicated studio space being related to several characteristics.

**Modern equipment.** Small Group Training Program administrators indicated that furnishing modern equipment was the most important characteristic of dedicated studio space \((M=4.43; SD=0.99)\). A dedicated studio space did not affect the perception of adequate equipment, \(\chi^2 = 1.50; p = 0.83\). These findings illustrate the importance of providing and maintaining modern equipment for the small group training program.

**Comfort of space.** Programs with dedicated studio spaces were more likely to describe their space as comfortable and pleasant, \(\chi^2 = 13.38; p = 0.01\). Small Group Training program administrators with dedicated studio spaces perceived their program space as being more comfortable and pleasant than those using general or shared facility space \((M=3.83; SD=1.11)\). Figure 8 provides more information regarding space and equipment.

**Figure 8  Space and Equipment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>(M)</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is an adequate square footage for SGT</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The space allocated for SGT is comfortable and pleasant</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is adequate equipment for a SGT class</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The equipment available for SGT is modern and in good condition</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. SGT = small group training*

**Perceived fitness gains.** With a dedicated studio space, it was interesting to see if this had any impact on participants’ fitness gains. There were no differences in the perception of fitness gains according to whether there was a dedicated studio space, \(\chi^2 = 0.33; p = 0.99 \) \((M=4.5; SD=1.09)\). The small group training program increased fitness of participants \((M=4.35; SD=1.25)\).
Retention. Program administrators with dedicated studio space reported more retention than those without dedicated studio space ($M=3.83; \text{SD}=1.07$).

Administrative and Marketing Characteristics

Administrative challenges. Participants were asked to supply open-ended answers regarding their perception of difficulty with facility space, equipment, or acquiring participants. Data were qualitatively coded to analyze themes. The most common themes were “time”, “space”, and “fee”. Scheduling the classes, finding the space, and charging a fee all presented as challenges to the program director. Figure 8 provides further clarification.

Marketing. Marketing methods utilized to market small group training programs were an important component of their effectiveness. The top three most popular marketing methods employed were social media (95%); flyers/posters posted in the campus recreation center (86%), and university media channels (68%). Figure Eight outlines how frequently institutions employ various marketing methods.
Since attention to marketing is a relatively new trend within campus recreation, program directors were asked if their campus recreation department utilizes a full-time marketing coordinator. Larger schools were more likely to have a full-time marketing coordinator with 62% having this position within their department. Schools that have full-time marketing coordinators utilized all marketing methods more. When asked to rank agreement with various outcomes of their small group training program, programs with a full-time marketing coordinator were more likely to perceive the generation of positive publicity as an outcome. Programs without a marketing coordinator could potentially present a challenge with the program’s success.

Most program administrators reported that they would like to see participation increases in their small group training program. Small Group Training programs may appeal to a specific demographic that may not be reached by traditional methods of marketing.

**Short-term future plans for program.** For the next one to two years, program directors are willing to commit future resources to continue offering small group training as part of the campus recreation program. Even though this program might be challenging to sustain, the majority of institutions are allowing it to take shape and slowly catch on.

**Value of Small Group Training programs to department.** Program directors were asked to evaluate a variety of value-driven statements regarding various outcomes of their small group
training program. Outcomes included building employment skills, increased fitness of participants, participant retention, program profitability, and generation of positive publicity. Figure 11 shows these outcomes.

**Figure 11  Small Group Training Perceived Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributes to increase fitness of participants</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows for staff to build employment skills</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generates positive publicity for department</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generates interest in exercise and wellness</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants are retained from session to session</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows the department to seem trendy</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is profitable</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The strongest agreement with the above value-driven statements show increasing fitness of participants, allowing for staff to build employment skills, and generating positive publicity for the campus recreation department were important provisions of the small group training program. It is interesting to note that trendiness and profitability were not perceived to be contributing significantly to the small group training program. Overall, the small group training program appears to positively impact and add value to campus recreation departments in a variety of ways.

**Conclusions.** Common small group training program structures follow a six-to-eight week packaged session of multiple classes meeting two-to-three times per week with restriction to registering for a specific class type, day, and time.
Chapter Five

Discussion

In this study, there were some important findings. There was a lot of variability in class types that campus recreation programs put under the “small group training” concept. These class types included but were not limited to cardiorespiratory programs, strength-based programs, high-intensity interval training, mind/body offerings, specialized equipment geared towards a specific fitness goal, sport-specific training, dance, martial arts, recovery programs, and many more.

Institutional Characteristics

For the institutions analyzed, a geographically representative sample was generated. It was interesting to see that the majority of responses came from Region IV which delineated the central states (Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Texas, and New Mexico). The least amount of responses came from Region III which comprises the Midwest (Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan). Small Group Training programs could potentially be a more popular program in certain areas of the country than others. In regards to institutional enrollments, larger schools comprised the majority of responses as there were very few small schools found to have a small group training program. More funding, students, larger diverse population, and resources could be a greater factor as to why larger schools tend to have specialized programs like small group training.

Program Characteristics

Several characteristics of small group training programs were found to be contributing factors to success and effectiveness of the program. Class types, registration methods, pricing
structure, program participants, staff credentials, and staff development allow for the small group training program director to further understand considerations for their program.

**Class Types**

The most popular class types were Boot Camp, Total Resistance Exercise (TRX), and running/walking classes. These findings can allow for the program administrator to re-examine their current class offerings and to potentially incorporate the above classes into their schedule. Boot camp classes can utilize equipment that is already in the facility and running/walking classes only require a knowledgeable instructor with limited, if any, equipment. This allows for the program administrator to start their Small Group Training program with little to no monetary investment. Starting the small group training program with a smaller schedule will allow for the program to take shape and develop a following. For programs that are looking to offer classes with specialized equipment, investing in portable equipment such as Total Resistance Exercise (TRX) might require more budgetary planning but could be a great opportunity to expand the small group training program and also host certification courses to increase staff skills and competencies.

**Registration Methods**

For small group training class registration methods, providing six-to-eight week packaged sessions of multiple classes was most frequently reported. Registrants are mostly restricted to registering for a specific class type, day, and time rather than being able to attend a variety of class types, days, and times.

The majority of small group training registrations occur at the campus recreation center, however, due to the world becoming more connected with technology, online registration was the second most popular form of registration. The ease and convenience of being able to register
for a program online is an attractive option for future participants. Providing online registration allows for the small group training program to reach patrons that may have never entered the campus recreation center or previously participated in programs. Online registration also allows for a more secure transaction, which provides peace of mind for registrants. The program director is essentially able to have an additional avenue to market their program and to increase participation, which was reported to be a goal for the majority of small group training program directors.

It is important to note that in-person registration at the campus recreation center is still the preferred method of choice. Having face-to-face communication allows for the program participant to have all of their questions answered and ensure that they are prepared for the commitment required. Online registration will not replace in-person registration, it is simply a great supplementary registration option to provide.

**Pricing Structure**

When choosing a pricing structure for the small group training program, it is important to consider what types of programming are being offered in the group fitness and personal training programs. Often times, there are group fitness classes offered that may resemble a small group training class. If the offering cycling classes in group fitness, it might be challenging to offer cycling as a small group training option. It might also be challenging to offer a Boot Camp small group training class if the group fitness program is already offering one. The program offerings for small group training need to be clearly differentiated to establish a brand and following. Small Group Training programs that appear to have the most success clearly define and differentiate their offerings.
Several institutions only offer mind/body classes such as Yoga and Pilates in the small group training program. With the intensive training and certification process for Yoga and Pilates instructors, it might be more advantageous to provide these offerings for a fee. This would eliminate competition with Yoga and Pilates being offered in group fitness. Participants will also learn the specific disciplines of Yoga and Pilates in a personalized environment focusing on their form and technique to maximize the effectiveness of the workout.

Eighty percent of classes cost between $2 and $10 per class with mind/body classes being the most expensive. It is important to consider making the small group training program affordable and recognize that most programs do not view small group training to be highly profitable. Given the finding that profitability was not as commonly perceived as an outcome of fitness gains or staff development experiences, perhaps program administrators can focus on a lower price to increase participation. Offering a lower price for students and not more than a $10 difference for members to pay provides incentive for both demographics to participate. The pricing structures need to be comparable between similar program areas.

Small Group Training Program Participants

Program directors were asked to provide percentage estimates of their small group training program participant demographics. Undergraduate students comprised the majority of participants in the small group training program while faculty/staff followed closely behind. With this information, the program director can target program offerings to appeal towards undergraduate students and faculty/staff. Offering a small group training faculty/staff only class could provide more inclusivity and clearly differentiate from other program offerings. This class could be offered during time(s) of the day that work into their schedules such as early mornings and lunchtime.
Staff Credentials

Almost all of the institutions analyzed required their small group training instructors to have a nationally recognized fitness certification and/or if teaching a specialized class, they would need to obtain that equipment’s specific certification. Furnishing a nationally recognized or specialized certification protects the public from harm. These certifications also allow the small group training instructor to obtain essential knowledge and apply what they learn in a development-oriented environment.

Staff Development

Findings regarding staff development have implications in the potential of small group training programs as places in which student-employees can gain valuable job skills. While program directors listed knowledge of exercise science as an important component of teaching small group training, class management techniques were reported to be more important. Class management techniques were reported to be the most significant topic for small group training instructors to receive during staff training. This consists of but is not limited to learning the names of the participants on the roster, establishing rapport, communicating effectively, setting up the room with all equipment needed for class, providing a clear description of the workout, giving personalized attention to participants, demonstrating the exercises (but not necessarily performing them), performing necessary fitness assessments, and keeping track/reviewing all client paperwork provided.

Guiding small group training instructors through the registration packet to make them more aware of the information obtained will allow them to get to know their participants better, learn about their health/exercise history, and give them the opportunity to ask follow-up questions. This will naturally progress into the coach/instructor learning the participants’ names
and allow them to establish rapport when they call the participant prior to the start of the first class.

Effective communication is an integral component of the small group training instructor’s job. Everyone communicates differently and by communicating with participants through calling, texting, and emailing, dissimilar communication styles can be reached. Setting up the room for the small group training class is something that clearly differentiates the program for group fitness. With a premium fee-based program, something as simple as setting up the equipment and atmosphere of the room allows for a close-knit inclusive experience.

Providing an overview of the workout will likely increase rapport between the small group training instructor and their participants by providing a clear objective. Demonstrating exercises for participants allows them to increase achievement motivation and self-efficacy. Performing pre- and post-fitness assessments gives objectivity to baseline measures and fitness gains over the duration of the class.

The ability to work with special populations also surfaced as an important topic for small group training staff trainings. Working with special populations such as older adults and the disabled exemplifies a great chance for the small group training program to offer more inclusive opportunities. By appealing to underserved populations, the small group training program can serve as an accommodating and inviting option.

Individuals with physical limitations such as those with hearing and vision impairments would benefit from individualized attention in a small group setting. It is imperative that these individuals have opportunities to participate in programs geared towards reaching their fitness goals. Increasing accessibility and accommodating these individuals will likely increase positive affect, program retention, and customer satisfaction. More specialized training and exposure to
special populations allows for the employee to expand their skill set. These findings illustrate important areas of professional competency that program directors can help staff develop during trainings.

**Program Outcomes**

One important area of consideration in this study involves the perception of various outcomes of small group training programs such as participant fitness gains, departmental publicity, and staff development. Program administrators indicated strongest agreement with participant fitness gains and staff development opportunities as program outcomes. Differences between programs were found regarding various program elements such as facility space, program length, and marketing resources.

**Facility Space**

Larger schools were more likely than smaller schools to have studios dedicated to small group training programs. Program administrators perceived dedicated studio spaces to contribute to a more pleasant environment for participants. Surprisingly, however, program administrators’ perceptions regarding participant fitness gains and equipment quality did not seem to differ based on whether or not their institution had a dedicated studio space for small group training.

**Marketing**

Marketing small group training is a time and labor-intensive job. This is illustrated by the finding that schools with full-time marketing coordinators saw more potential for their small group training programs to generate positive publicity for their department than programs without full-time marketing coordinators. Having a full-time marketing coordinator can allow the small group training program director to focus more on the administrative aspects of the
program. The marketing coordinator can focus their efforts on building the small group training program’s brand and creating compelling advertisements that appeal to the targeted audience.

Marketing the small group training program is also essential to increasing participation. To market a specialized program like small group training, a marketing plan needs to be developed. A catchy theme can set the stage for the small group training program to establish demand. Encouraging participants to “find their reason” and “train for life” allows them to feel a sense of belonging and camaraderie. In addition, to make a bold statement, photography and videography can complement the chosen theme for small group training to convey the program’s message and intent clearly.

With an increasingly connected world, it is no surprise that social media was the most frequently used marketing method for small group training programs. With the promotion of sustainability across the country, especially on college campuses, printing flyers and posters for the small group training program will most likely decrease with technology supplementing this marketing method.

A new trend within collegiate recreation is providing an application compatible with Apple and Android operating systems to advertise programs at users’ fingertips. Information about the small group training program needs to be catchy and accessible through smart phone applications and social media channels such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Social media marketing can help increase the presence of the Small Group Training program.

**Implications for Future Research**

Several next steps and recommendations on small group training need to be considered for future research. Surveying small group training participants to obtain their perception of the program will extend the understanding of effectiveness on both the programming and participant
sides. Since these programs are designed for participants, collecting data on this population will allow for a targeted demographic to take shape. With the variety of institutions offering these programs, a pilot study could be conducted for one university’s program participants and then expanded to encompass more institutions.

Examining small group training program administrators’ perceptions regarding program outcomes and effectiveness increases understanding of a recently trending program style. Because the addition of specialized programs utilizes valuable departmental resources, it is important to understand program outcomes in evaluating their value. It is also important to understand the varying motives of departments in offering such programs. Different campus recreation departments may place differing levels of value on various program outcomes. Further exploring patterns in desired program outcomes might help practitioners achieve focus in their program’s mission.

Further exploration on developing job skills for staff members within the small group training program is necessary. With a hybrid, specialized skill set incorporating qualities from personal training and group fitness, student instructors can build upon these separate skills. Teaching small group training can also allow for student instructors to practice marketing themselves and the program. It would also be interesting to explore the idea of having student staff members comprise a marketing team to advertise small group training leading up to future registration periods. Tactics such as flash mobs, distributing promotional items, and offering incentives could provide more insight to increased effectiveness of programming.

Conclusions

Small Group Training is a multi-faceted premium fitness program offering in collegiate recreation. With the consideration of institutional characteristics, program characteristics, and
outcomes of program administrators’ perceptions, much can be gleaned from this hybrid fitness program.

Small Group Training programs could potentially be a more popular program in certain areas of the country than others. The most popular class types were Boot Camp, Total Resistance Exercise (TRX), and running/walking classes. Program administrators who designed programs six-to-eight weeks in length noted better retention of participants than programs designed to be three-to-five weeks long. Small Group Training programs that appear to have the most success clearly define and differentiate their offerings.

It is important to consider making the small group training program affordable and recognize that most programs do not view Small Group Training to be highly profitable. Undergraduate students comprised the majority of participants in the small group training program while faculty/staff followed closely behind. Almost all of the institutions analyzed required their small group training instructors to have a nationally recognized fitness certification and/or if teaching a specialized class, they would need to obtain that equipment’s specific certification.

Class management techniques were reported to be the most significant topic for small group training to receive during staff training. Larger schools were more likely than smaller schools to have studios dedicated to small group training programs. Schools with full-time marketing coordinators saw more potential for their small group training programs to generate positive publicity for their department than programs without full-time marketing coordinators. These findings help support that small group training represents an inclusive opportunity for collegiate recreation to incorporate and sustain as a program offering.
References


December 1, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jade Dwarkin
     Dean Gorman

FROM: Ro Windwalker
       IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 14-11-279

Protocol Title: Examining the Perceptive Effectiveness of Collegiate Recreation Small Group Training Programs

Review Type: ☒ EXEMPT ☐ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 12/01/2014 Expiration Date: 11/30/2015

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 60 participants. If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.
Thesis Instrument

Administrative Effectiveness of Small Group Training Programs Survey (AESGTPS)

As part of a master’s thesis at the University of Arkansas, you are being invited to participate in a survey regarding Administrative Effectiveness of Small Group Training Programs.

There are no risks or penalties for your participation in this research study. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others. Your completed questionnaire results will be stored at the University of Arkansas. The questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Please remember that your participation in this study is voluntary. Participants in the study must be a current Small Group Training Program director at the time of survey completion. No one else should complete the survey. By completing the following questionnaire you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. You are free to skip any particular question or to stop at any time if you choose.

You acknowledge that all your present questions have been answered in a language you can understand and all future questions will be treated in the same manner. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Jade Dworkin at (479) 575-6080.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Ro Windwalker, Compliance Coordinator for Research Support and Sponsored Programs, at (479) 575-2208. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject, in confidence, with a member of the committee.

Q1 Do you currently hold the position of Small Group Training Program director?
   ☐ Yes (1)
   ☐ No (2)

Q2 Which NIRSA Region is your institution a part of?
   ☐ I (1)
   ☐ II (2)
   ☐ III (3)
   ☐ IV (4)
   ☐ V (5)
   ☐ VI (6)
Q3 What is your approximate university enrollment?
- Under 5,000 (1)
- 5,000-9,999 (2)
- 10,000-19,999 (3)
- 20,000-29,999 (4)
- 30,000 and above (5)

Q4 Which of the following class types does your program currently offer? (check all that apply)
- Pilates Reformer (1)
- Boot Camp (2)
- TRX (3)
- ViPR (4)
- Kettlebell (5)
- Stand up Paddleboard (6)
- Olympic Lifting (7)
- Kinesis (8)
- PowerPlate (9)
- Restorative Yoga (10)
- TotalGym (11)
- Rowing Ergometer (12)
- Triathlon Training (13)
- Running/Walking (14)
- Other: (15)____________________

Q5 Which class types has your program offered in the past but no longer offer? Why?

Q6 Please identify the three most popular class types at your institution (Check all three):
- Pilates Reformer (1)
- Boot Camp (2)
- TRX (3)
- ViPR (4)
- Kettlebell (5)
- Stand up Paddleboard (6)
- Olympic Lifting (7)
- Kinesis (8)
- PowerPlate (9)
- Restorative Yoga (10)
- TotalGym (11)
- Rowing Ergometer (12)
- Triathlon Training (13)
- Running/Walking (14)
- Other: (15)____________________
Q7 Which certifications are Small Group Training coaches/instructors required to have in order to teach? (e.g. ACE, ACSM, NASM, PTA Global, NSCA, CSCS)

Q8 Over the course of the school year, which of the following topics do you feel are important for Small Group Training coaches/instructors to receive as part of in-service or cross-training? (Check all that apply)
- Working with special populations (1)
- New equipment training (2)
- Exercise science topics (3)
- Teaching/class management skills (4)
- Other: (5) ____________________

Q9 Approximately how many hours of job-specific training/in-service do Small Group Training coaches/instructors receive from campus recreation staff over the course of a school year?

Q10 What is the starting wage rate for Small Group Training coaches/instructors at your institution?

Q11 Which of the following session structures do you utilize in your Small Group Training program? (Check all that apply)
- Participants are able to register for a single class outside of a packaged session (1)
- Participants register for a 3-5 week packaged session of multiple classes (2)
- Participants register for a 6-8 week packaged session of multiple classes (3)
- Participants register for a 9-or-above week packaged session of multiple classes (4)

Q12 How frequent are classes within a small group training session offered per week?

Q13 When registering for a class/section, participants are:
- Restricted to registering for a specific class type, day, and time (1)
- Able to attend a variety of class types, days, and times (2)

Q15 If your program registration format is not accurately reflected in the previous question, please provide additional explanation here:

Q14 What registration methods are available to small group training participants? (Check all that apply)
- In-person at the campus recreation center (1)
- Online (2)
- Other (list): (3) ____________________

Q16 On average, what is the price per class? (For example, a 4-week session consisting of 1 class per week is $40. The price per class comes out to be $10).
Q17 Do you utilize a dedicated studio space for small group training?
☐ Yes (1)
☐ No (2)

Q18 Indicate your agreement with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree (1)</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree (2)</th>
<th>Neither disagree or agree (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat agree (4)</th>
<th>Strongly agree (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is an adequate square footage for small group training activities (1)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is adequate equipment for an effective small group training class (2)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The equipment that is available for small group training is modern and in good condition (3)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The space allocated for small group training is comfortable and pleasant (4)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q19 Is your Small Group Training program integrated with any of the following programs?
☐ Group Fitness (1)
☐ Non-Credit/ Instructional Programs (2)
☐ Other (list): (3) ____________________
Q20 Do you perceive any difficulty in competing for facility space, equipment, or participants with programs such as Group Fitness or Non-Credit/ Instructional programs?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q21 If you answered yes to the above question, please explain why:

Q22 Which methods do you utilize to market your Small Group Training program? (Check all that apply)
- Social Media (1)
- Flyers/posters posted in campus recreation center (2)
- Flyers/posters posted in campus buildings other than recreation center (3)
- University media (e-newsletters, university website, university-wide calendar) (4)
- Guerilla marketing methods (flash mobs, demonstrations, tabling) (5)

Q23 Does your campus recreation department utilize a full-time marketing coordinator?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q24 Estimate the % of each type of small group training participant:
- New participant (1)
- Returning participant (2)

Q25 Estimate the % of each type of small group training participants at your institution:
- Undergraduate students (1)
- Graduate students (2)
- International students (3)
- Faculty/Staff (4)
- Special Populations (5)

Q26 How many unique participants register/attend your small group training program in a year?

Q27 How many multiple participants attend your small group training program in a year?

Q28 Would you like small group training program participation to be:
- Lower (1)
- Higher (2)
- If appropriate, please explain: (3) ____________________

Q29 Do you plan to continue offering small group training as a part of the campus recreation program in the next 1-2 years?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)
Q30 Please indicate your agreement with the following statements. The Small Group Training program:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (1)</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Neither Disagree nor Agree (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree (4)</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributes to increased fitness of participants (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants are retained from session to session (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is profitable (3)</td>
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<td>Allows for staff to build employment skills (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generates positive publicity for the campus recreation department (5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generates interest in exercise and wellness among the university community (6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allows the campus recreation department to seem trendy (7)</td>
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</table>