

# **Impact of ECU Campus Recreation Participation on Social Belonging and Student / Faculty / Staff Retention**

Is it important to know why Campus Recreation programs and services are important to student life as well as to understand what overall benefits students receive from the program as a whole? This study revealed that students, faculty, and staff who used Campus Recreation programs and services more frequently were more likely to attend the university, experience a place of bonding, social belonging to Campus Recreation and the university, integration into the university and hence retention at the university. From a practical perspective, the findings provide information for the university to better understand how to attract and retain students, faculty, and staff throughout their academic careers by the presence of Campus Recreation programs and services.

## **Methodology**

### **Questionnaire Instrument**

A 15-item questionnaire consisting of four demographic and 11 Likert-scale (1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Unsure, 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly disagree) items were developed. Two open ended questions were asked as well.

### **Procedures and Participants**

The investigators distributed the questionnaire to students, faculty, and staff at Eastern Kentucky University. Convenience sampling was employed for this study. Convenience sampling entails extracting information from a population that is both easy to access and agreeable to participate in a study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). To adhere to the sampling technique, participants were approached as they entered the Fitness & Wellness Center and Burke Wellness Center and asked about their interest in participating in the study.

Asking individuals to volunteer to take part in a survey study is referred to as nonrandom sampling (O'Leary, 2004). Traditionally, nonrandom sampling has been viewed as being inadequate. However, O'Leary (2004) stated that "there is a growing recognition that non-random samples can credibly represent populations, given that the selection is done with the goal of representativeness in mind" (p. 109). Since the representativeness of this study was to determine the impact of the ECU Campus Recreation programs on student, faculty, and staff participation; a nonrandom sampling technique was warranted. However, the credibility of the study would be threatened if the investigation was designed to be generalized to a greater population rather from one selected population (O'Leary, 2004).

Participants who took part in the survey were notified in writing on the questionnaire that participation in the study was completely voluntary and there would be no penalties for choosing not to participate. Nowhere on the questionnaire did the respondents need to either identify themselves or the reason they were at the Fitness & Wellness Center or Burke Wellness Center. All responses were kept completely confidential, as they were anonymously entered on database software. At no time was an attempt made to identify participants, as data were analyzed and reported using group demographics.

## Results

The questionnaire was distributed to 450 participants over a four week period, 373 fully completed it for an acceptable return rate of 83% (Patton, 1990). Questionnaires that were distributed and fell into one of the following categories were not included in the data analysis. The return rate provided a 95% confidence level in the results based off EKU annual enrollment.

Participants were asked to rate the statement below on a Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

**Table 1**

Statement	N	Mean	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Unsure (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
Campus Recreation services provide strong emotional ties to the university.	371	2.05	130	132	82	16	11
Campus Recreation is essential in creating a social bonding experience.	369	2.10	125	139	62	30	13
My involvement in Campus Recreation services has improved my ability to interact with new people.	370	2.15	126	120	79	32	13
My overall happiness has improved since taking part in activities offered by Campus Recreation.	371	1.85	168	132	41	19	11
My self-confidence has increased since taking part in activities offered by Campus Recreation.	367	1.89	158	137	37	24	11
My leadership ability has increased as a result of participation in Campus Recreation activities.	371	2.36	102	96	121	40	12
Participation in Campus Recreation has improved my sense of belonging to the university.	371	2.09	124	142	66	24	15
Participation in activities offered by Campus Recreation has increased my satisfaction with my overall college experience.	360	1.90	162	114	52	21	11
The Fitness & Wellness Center was a major factor when choosing EKU.	360	2.81	80	82	81	61	56
I have considered leaving the university.	362	3.73	46	44	34	75	163
One primary reason I have not left the university is Campus Recreation services.	360	3.03	56	70	99	76	59

Quick highlights or observations from the data include:

- 71% of users agreed or strongly agreed that Campus Recreation services provide strong emotional ties to the university.
- 72% of users agreed or strongly agreed that Campus Recreation is essential in creating a social bonding experience.
- 66% of users agreed or strongly agrees that involvement in Campus Recreation Services has improved their ability to interact with other people.
- 81% of users agreed or strongly agreed that their overall happiness has increased since taking part in Campus Recreation services
- 80% of users agreed or strongly agreed that their self-confidence has increased as a result of participation in Campus Recreation services.
- 53% of user agreed or strongly agreed that their leadership ability has increased as a result of Campus Recreation participation
- 71% of users agreed or strongly agreed that participation Campus Recreation has improved their sense of belonging to the university.
- 77% of users agreed or strongly agreed that Campus Recreation participation has increased their satisfaction with their overall college experience.
- 45% of users said Campus Recreation programs and services were a major factor in choosing ECU
- 35% of users said Campus Recreation programs and services were a primary reason for not leaving ECU.

The results from the Impact Survey are very valuable in informing university administrators, faculty, staff, and students of the positive impact ECU Campus Recreation programs and services have on the ECU university community. Our goal for each student is for them to reach college completion while discovering experiential learning opportunities such as Campus Recreation services. Based off the survey, the experiential learning opportunities available through Campus Recreation positively impact the student's ability to reach college completion through increases in social belonging, university belonging, self-confidence and overall increases in university retention.

## **Conclusion**

University administration should notice the importance of recreational sports because these programs are enhancing the institutional goals of development and retention. This study was done to further investigate the impact of Campus Recreation use on social belonging and retention. The findings revealed useful information for recreational sports professionals as well as for university administrators. From a practical perspective, the findings provide information for the university to better understand how to attract and retain students throughout their academic careers by the presence of these programs and services. In addition, recreational sports professionals should keep in mind the far-reaching impact of their duties and actions and keep the importance of programming available.

## References

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