

Department of Exercise and Sport Studies – Retreat Report

Barbara Brehm-Curtis, Chair

Retreat Date: 4/18/08

Department faculty in attendance: Don Siegel, Jim Johnson, Barbara Brehm-Curtis, Chris Shelton, Jane Stangl, Lynn Oberbillig, Jackie Blei, Tim Bacon

Goals for the Retreat:

The Department of Exercise and Sport Studies met on April 18, 2008 to review the ways in which we contribute to the Smith Design for Learning, and how we could improve our support of the Design given our current resources. We also took this opportunity to revisit our midterm review, and to discuss the curriculum of our graduate program, and propose possible changes that would improve both our graduate and undergraduate offerings, and the way we work with other departments on campus, in particular the Athletic Program.

In preparation for our retreat we reviewed:

1. The Smith Design for Learning: A Plan to Reimagine a Liberal Arts Education
2. Our most recent decennial review report
3. Our most recent midterm review report

Outcomes:

- 1. We concluded that our unique undergraduate curriculum provides excellent opportunities to enhance most of the capacities outlined in the Smith Design for Learning.**
- 2. We concluded that our performance course program provides important opportunities for students to develop physical activity knowledge and skills, and a habit of lifelong health promotion.**

3. We must continue to explore ways to continue our programs, especially our graduate program, with the loss of our lecturer position. While we currently have some part-time support from a sabbatical replacement, we cannot run the graduate program with the staff that will be left when the sabbatical replacement is gone. In fact we are struggling to run the program with twenty graduate students and our current configuration on board. We explored the possibility of offering our program with part time adjuncts, but concluded that continuing to offer our programs at the current level would not be feasible.

4. We also discussed our graduate curriculum.

1. Review of the Capacities Developed in the Undergraduate Curriculum

The ESS undergraduate theory classes have been designed to provide students with a wide variety of courses in the many disciplines that comprise our field. While there is currently no major in our program, students completing a minor in ESS are exposed to a wide variety of disciplines, and come to understand the various ways people study sport, physical activity, and health.

All of our classes contribute in multiple ways to the Smith Design for Learning. Most of us have taken multiple workshops on teaching writing across the curriculum over the past decades, and work a great deal with writing clearly in our courses. Many courses also include work with oral presentations, developing the capacity to speak articulately. Reading closely and analyzing academic texts is a part of every class, developing the ability to evaluate evidence and read critically.

Our science classes develop students' capacities to use quantitative skills and to apply scientific reasoning. Several classes offer opportunities for both independent and collaborative work. Our sport history and sociology classes work a great deal on studying the historical and cultural roles of sport and physical activity. Because our field is a multi- and interdisciplinary one, students are continually exposed to multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives on a variety of issues.

Several of our classes offer international and multicultural perspectives, challenging students to understand other cultures in other countries as well as here in the Pioneer Valley. We are grateful for the diversity of the Smith student body, which often allows for great discussions of cultural differences, hopefully expanding student tolerance and understanding of diversity.

We were all challenged to think about our courses, and the ways in which they support the Smith Design for Learning. Here are some examples of the capacities developed in our classes:

FYS 135 - Women of Discovery: Students develop capacities for writing clearly and speaking articulately. We also deal with environmental challenges related to exploration--how discoverers change things. Historical development is a theme of this course since exploration often opens areas to the outside world--for good or bad! Moral issues and racism are discussed as related to different societies.

FYS 149 – An Even Playing Field? Women, Sport, and Equity
Capacities are addressed through lectures, assignments, class discussion and group projects. These include the ability to think critically and analytically and to convey knowledge and understanding, writing clearly, speaking articulately, reading closely and working both independently and collaboratively. Students develop an historical and comparative perspective by studying the historical development of sport culture in the US. In this class students engage with communities beyond Smith through guest speakers and readings, hopefully learning tolerance and understanding diversity in sport.

ESS 100 - Introduction to Exercise & Sport Studies—Interdisciplinary Perspectives:
The essence of the introductory course is to develop a capacity for understanding multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to the field. Students are asked to write papers, present

work orally, read widely, evaluate and present evidence by applying scientific reasoning and apply quantitative skills within that process, depending upon the project. Further, students are presented with cross-cultural information that strengthens their moral reasoning to ethical situations within the discipline as well as offering a deeper appreciation for the historical and philosophical richness of sport and exercise overall.

ESS 140 – Health Behavior: writing clearly (this is a WI course), speaking clearly, reading closely, evaluating and presenting evidence accurately (both written and in oral presentations). Students practice scientific reasoning and beginning level quantitative skills as they examine risk factors for disease. Some moral reasoning discussions evolve as we tackle topics such as health care access, abortion, and medical decision making.

ESS150 – Nutrition and Health: strong emphasis in this course on reading closely, evaluating evidence, and research/information literacy. Basic quantitative skills are used in diet analysis.

ESS 175 – Applied Exercise Science: strong emphasis on writing clearly with a focus on lab reports. Also developed are capacities for quantitative skills and scientific reasoning. Students work independently and in groups to solve problems.

ESS 215 – Exercise Physiology: Very similar to ESS175, but with more emphasis on writing and revision of drafts.

ESS 210 - Kinesiology: writing clearly, scientific analysis, and a great deal of quantitative skill development.

ESS 220 – Psychology of Sport: Students develop capacities to write clearly (papers), speak articulately (through hosting film viewings, presentations & class discussions), reading closely (text and journal articles), evaluating and presenting evidence accurately, apply scientific reasoning (papers applying models published in scientific articles). Students work both independently and collaboratively (Wiki, videotaped film reviews, co-hosting films, papers, peer review of papers), understand multi- and interdisciplinary approaches (cultural studies articles).

ESS 225 - Education Through the Physical: Youth Sports: Students develop capacities for writing clearly, speaking articulately, reading closely, evaluating and presenting evidence accurately, applying scientific reasoning, working both independently and collaboratively, engaging with communities beyond Smith, learning tolerance and understanding diversity.

ESS 230 - Mediated Images of Sport: Students are engaged in this course largely through collaborative efforts that mandate concise writing, articulate speaking and close reading. While evaluation and presentation of visible evidence is salient, the application of quantitative skills is essential to engaging work that is artistic, symbolic and laden with diverse and ethical renderings. At its core the course necessitates an understanding of interdisciplinary methods and approaches.

ESS 340 – Women’s Health: Current Topics: The small seminar size allows students to do a great deal of writing, speaking, and reading. Students engage in in-depth discussions of health issues, requiring careful analysis of evidence, scientific reasoning, and independent research work. We often discuss health issues from multidisciplinary approaches, and take on ethical issues in our discussions.

EDC 336 - Seminar in American Education: Students develop capacities for writing clearly, speaking articulately, reading closely, evaluating and presenting evidence accurately, knowing and using quantitative skills, applying scientific reasoning, working both independently and collaboratively, engaging with communities beyond Smith, learning tolerance and understanding diversity,

ESS 200 – Sport and the American Dream: Students develop capacities for writing clearly, speaking articulately, reading closely, evaluating and presenting evidence accurately, applying scientific reasoning, working both independently and collaboratively, learning tolerance and understanding diversity.

Community Collaboration

A Center for Community Collaboration is being developed to enhance the Smith Design for Learning. Both ESS 225 – Education Through the Physical, and EDC 336 Seminar in American Education offer service learning components.

Promoting a Culture of Research and Inquiry

In preparation for our retreat, we also thought a great deal about how our department cultivates a culture of research, inquiry, and discovery for our students. Most of our classes have developed many ways that engage learners in a variety of experiences. For example, ESS 100 asks students to explore the many ways scholars study exercise and sport, introducing in a very concrete way practice in multidisciplinary analysis. ESS 175 Applied Exercise Science is laboratory-based, and students learn by collecting data and analyzing their laboratory findings. ESS 210 – Kinesiology and ESS 215 – Exercise Physiology also have extensive laboratory components that engage students in inquiry-

based learning, creating cooperative learning opportunities for students to work with exercise science theory and apply scientific methods of evaluation and reasoning.

In ESS225 – Education Through the Physical: Youth Sports, students design, organize and implement a series of youth sport days at Smith College. Students in ESS 200 – Sport and the American Dream, work in the Smith Archives to gather information for historical projects. As our faculty work with students from a diversity of educational backgrounds we have expanded our teaching styles beyond the straight lecture format, and have developed a variety of ways to reach students in meaningful, interesting ways.

2. The contribution of the ESS performance course offerings to the Smith Design for Learning

The Exercise and Sport Studies Department perceives itself to play a unique role in the life of the College, in that its mission is to promote an appreciation for, and provide opportunities to engage students, faculty, and staff in exercise and sports activities which can be pursued throughout one's life. Although the developments of knowledge and skill in these areas have always been a department objective, it has become increasingly evident from research that involvement in daily moderate and vigorous activity is highly correlated with the quality of life that individuals can expect to enjoy (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). In this way, the Department of Exercise and Sport Studies helps students prepare for leading lives of influence, achievement, and fulfillment in a rapidly changing world.

Our performance course program offers a broad range of activity that help students prepare for maintaining physical activity throughout life. We also offer courses that

contribute to health and well-being, including stress management and physical conditioning. Our outdoor activities empower students to take on challenges outside of school, from climbing a steep rock face, running a rapid river, living outdoors, understanding one's role in nature, appreciating our natural environment. Our mind-body offerings, including yoga, kickboxing, and self-defense, encourage contemplative practice and reflection.

Although the importance of promoting a physically active and vigorous lifestyle has become more accepted by leaders in education and health, public support for physical education and sports programs is declining. Indeed, leaders in the health and medical communities are identifying lack of physical activity as a critical factor in the link between increasing overweight/obesity and a variety of morbidities, including high blood pressure, heart disease, Type II diabetes, and a variety of cancers. Data from various surveys conducted over the past 30 years also reveal an ominous and continuous trend of increasing weight and obesity across all age ranges (Mei et al., 1998; Ogden et al., 2002; Flegal et al., 2002).

Accompanying these trends are increasing health care costs. Health insurance costs have also been significantly impacted by this sedentary lifestyle-weight-morbidity syndrome. Consequently, virtually all constituencies in the health sector are calling for children, adolescents and adults to increase their activity levels. Ironically, as experts have identified and documented the inverse relationships between physical activity involvement and weight, and between weight and health, school based physical education programs are being cut or eliminated (Kemper, 2003). Policy makers must understand

that a failure to invest in the health and well-being of today's youth will ultimately result in future costs to support an increasingly immobile and dysfunctional population.

Within this general framework, research has also revealed that girls participate in physical activity at a less frequent rate and lower intensity than boys, and diminish their involvement at a faster rate as they enter adolescence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000). This pattern is particularly problematic for African-American girls and adolescents. Indeed, a recent study reported that African-American adolescent females, by age 19, have physical activity participation rates approaching 0% (Kimm et al., 2002). Research also has reported over 50% of African-American females aged 40 and above are classified as obese, and 80% are overweight (Flegal et al., 2002).

From such a context, the department views its mission as not only providing opportunities for the Smith Community to develop and hone skills for engaging in physical activities, but to acquire such as part of a national effort to promote health and well-being. It is our view that Smith students should be encouraged to become or stay active throughout their college years and beyond. As with population data identified above we also are aware of the particular needs of underserved and underrepresented students who may become engaged in physical activity for the first time in their lives at Smith.

Presently, students are permitted to take only 4 ESS courses for credit. This restriction resulted from discussions related to the granting of credit for ESS courses in the early 1980's, and concomitant concerns about how much credit should be given to physical activity coursework in the Smith curriculum. In light of the national trends in sedentary lifestyle, and the particularly troubling data on females, our department

continues to endorse an addition of 4 credits to a student's current limit of 4 credits so that she may register and receive credit for an ESS class for each semester in which she is enrolled at the college. It is our intent not only to help students acquire the knowledge and skill necessary for lifelong recreational involvement, but to reinforce the connection between an active lifestyle and quality of life.

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3. Ramifications of the loss of full-time lecturer position

Two years ago ESS was denied renewal of our full-time lecturer position. This position taught several courses, advised special studies, served as liaison for our graduate students in their assistant coaching practicum, and also served as graduate advisor. This shifts an increasing administrative burden to the remaining full-time faculty, limiting their participation in other areas of service and scholarship, such as serving on college committees and attending other events. Our undergraduate theory courses are regularly bracketed, and often taught every other year to accommodate sabbaticals and first-year seminars.

We must continue to explore ways to continue our programs, especially our graduate program, with the loss of our lecturer position. While we currently have some part-time support from a sabbatical replacement, we cannot run the graduate program with the staff that will be left when the sabbatical replacement is gone. In fact we are struggling to run the program with twenty graduate students and our current configuration on board. We explored the possibility of offering our program with part time adjuncts, but concluded that continuing to offer our programs at the current level would not be feasible.

4. Curricular changes for the graduate program

Our enrollment in the graduate program for academic year 08-09 is unusually high, and we discussed how to reconcile an increasing number of students with our position loss and changes in the coaching education field. Suggestions included the following:

- Increase credits awarded for the coaching practicum, and continue to better incorporate coaching staff and other mentors into this experience.
- Increase credits awarded for Sport Law, to increase student experience in this important field.

- Possibly eliminate other requirements as necessary to accommodate our reduced faculty size.

Acknowledgement: We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Michelle G. Finley, for helping with retreat arrangements and preparing materials for our meeting.

