

Center for Community Wellness & Recreation

The percentage of young people who are overweight has more than tripled since 1980 with over 9 million young people overweight. Participating in physical activity declines as children get older and males are more physically active than females in high school. Despite skyrocketing childhood obesity rates and calls from Congress, the Surgeon General, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention most states have extremely weak physical education requirements. The percentage of students who attend a daily physical education class has dropped from 42% in 1991 to 28% in 2003. (NASPE and AHA 2006 Shape of the Nation report) And yet these are our Smith students whom we are “teaching” to be prepared for life after Smith. Are we doing enough to reverse this trend? Will Smith students be prepared for future life beyond campus? Should an effective model of work-life balance include wellness and fitness practices that reduce stress on campus and prepare students to lead healthy and productive lives? If we are teaching students to be our future leaders, they must be healthy and engaged and feeling good about themselves. These habits must be formed during their college year.

I would argue that Smith is not effectively meeting the fitness/wellness needs of its students. Students are a “stressed out”, work driven, technology dependent with little regard for their own well being. We offer many fitness, wellness, and recreation activities in a very fragmented delivery system. We tend to provide programming to those who “get it” rather than those in need. We have also created a culture on campus that promotes an imbalance in wellness. So what would it take to change the culture of Smith? Below is a list of ideas that is just a beginning to what could be developed at Smith.

- Create a Center for Community Wellness and Recreation. This Center would be charged with the responsibility of creating programming to attend to students’ needs, educational programming, and just pure recreation fun. The Center could also be charged with addressing the needs of employees with regards to wellness and recreation. Why is this critical? Having a Center for wellness and recreation:
 - 1) Makes a statement that we value wellness and recreation and intend to do something about it.
 - 2) Allows a director to be hired to deliver these services rather than a random group of individuals on campus who value this objective enough to offer their limited version of programming
 - 3) Allows for economies of scale so that duplicity of programming does not occur
 - 4) Allows for clear communication about programming and opportunities
 - 5) Makes it clear who is responsible for programming in this area

- Make personal training programs available to the entire campus. This would include a fitness/wellness assessment, a personal plan, and record-keeping of retention and adherence. More than 70% of clients who work with personal trainers show retention of a year or longer. Research also indicates that individuals who commit to a plan for 4-5 years have developed lifelong habits/changes.

- Current departments of the College who provide fitness and wellness programming would continue to do so. They would work through the Center to coordinate these offerings.
- Create new programming that would emphasize “community” fitness rather than programming simply for students or simply for employees. Employees working along side students would be role modeling work-life balance. A community at play will cross cultural lines and create a “diverse” community environment embracing a common goal.
- Incentive programming could be established to encourage people to participate. This might take the form of “corporate challenge cups”, or relay for life participation, 10,000 steps, or acknowledgement of individual achievements. Or maybe the College would consider a campus-wide “run” for charity or triathlon training. Why do we value employees who show good customer service or teamwork but not those who demonstrate good work-life balance or good fitness? The research suggests that fit employees are more productive and “cost” less to the institution in terms of absenteeism, re-training, or health care costs. Our HR department recognizes this fact and provides as much programming as currently possible. Given the resources, I am sure they could offer more programming. A Center for Community Wellness could help them do so.
- Offer a wellness pre-orientation program with mini sessions that include a campus guide to nutrition, recreation activities, fitness assessments, and other healthy behaviors. Have students create a roadmap to wellness that they would follow over the course of their four years at Smith.
- Give students academic credit for participation in athletics or other structured programs that achieve fitness goals.
- Hire a Fitness Director who oversees the Olin Fitness Center and the hiring of personal trainers and who also creates some of the programming as identified above.
- Provide more classes for students with needs; i.e. sedentary, overweight, inexperienced, disabled.
- Find a way to link the curriculum to the co-curricular. Do we even have a curriculum for wellness and if so, how do students identify it as such?
- Offer a J-term program of assessment of wellness for students to create a roadmap towards lifetime wellness. Bring alums to campus that can provide resources in this area and demonstrate healthy lifestyles.

The ideas of what to do to improve overall fitness and wellness are endless. What is needed to accomplish many of these ideas is a commitment to this objective as an important part of our daily work-life balance. For many people, fitness and wellness are considered “add ons” to daily life. We need to change this concept and we can do so only when we teach and demonstrate to students how this objective should be integrated on a day to day basis in their lives. The first step in doing this is to create a Center for Community Wellness that is charged with this objective.

Submitted By,

Lynn Oberbillig
Director of Athletics