

## Editorial

### The Imperative of Instructional Physical Activity Programs (IPAP) in Higher Education



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In recent years, a concerning trend has emerged among college students: a marked decline in physical activity, deteriorating physical health, and a relative lack of resilience or “hardiness.” This phenomenon, exacerbated by the pervasive influence of social media, increased screen time, and a shift away from physically demanding jobs, has roots that trace back to the mid-19th century. In fact, as early as 1860, a private university in the northeastern United States recognized the importance of physical exercise, making it a mandatory component of the academic experience (Stearns, 1855). This pivotal move ultimately led to the establishment of College and University Instructional Physical Activity Programs, which have since become integral to the fabric of American higher education (Casebolt et al., 2017).

Today, as we navigate a complex landscape influenced by social, economic, and technological changes, the relevance of Instructional Physical Activity Programs (IPAP) has never been more critical. These programs, alongside personal health and wellness courses, serve as essential vehicles for promoting student well-being and fostering healthy lifestyle choices during a transformative period of life. For many students, this is the first time they experience autonomy in their decision-making, often without parental guidance. It is during this formative phase that they begin to shape their beliefs, values, and health behaviors (Hochberg & Konner, 2020).

IPAPs provide students with vital skills and knowledge that can catalyze lifelong engagement in physical activity and overall wellness (Cho et al., 2020). By encouraging participation in physical activities, these programs can significantly influence students’ health trajectories, equipping them with the tools needed to cultivate resilience and well-being throughout their lives (Lothes & Kantor, 2021).



However, the current climate poses significant challenges to the sustainability of IPAPs. Increasingly, colleges and universities are cutting programs due to reduced enrollments, financial instability, and the pressure to prioritize other required learning experiences. This trend places IPAPs at risk, and it is crucial that we critically assess their impact and effectiveness in light of the evolving higher education landscape.

The need for such programs is further underscored by the alarming decline in overall student wellness, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has negatively affected mental and emotional health. With projections indicating a decline in life expectancy for this generation compared to their parents for the first time, we must leverage all available resources to support students in achieving optimal wellness.

It is imperative for IPAPs to not only demonstrate their effectiveness in enhancing student health and well-being but also for college administrators to recognize and advocate for their continued integration into academic curricula. As we move forward, the vitality of IPAPs in higher education cannot be overstated. They are essential not just for fostering immediate health benefits but also for cultivating a generation equipped to navigate the complexities of modern life with resilience and vitality.

This issue has a unique focus on IPAP, with both descriptions of programs and outcomes as well as discussions of challenges to longevity facing this essential component of higher education. We hope you enjoy these thoughtful articles and that they advance both discourse and creative problem solving for keeping IPAP both relevant and prioritized as an integral component to building healthy academic communities.

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