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INCLUSIVITY OF COLLEGIATE CAMPUS RECREATION PROGRAMS IN REGION VI OF NIRSA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF WEBSITES

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Bruning AM, et al. To improve the living conditions of and provide more rights and protections for individuals with disabilities, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law in 1990. Collegiate campus recreation programs are supported by student fees and/or tuition, they are a component of the educational enterprise, and they provide students a variety of benefits. As such, they should be available to all students, including those with disabilities. This study's purpose was to determine the inclusivity and accessibility of collegiate campus recreation programs for students with disabilities, specifically in terms of representativeness on program websites within Region VI of the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association. Twenty-four universities from Alaska, Arizona, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Northern California, Oregon, Southern California, Utah, and Washington were included. Each university's campus recreation website was reviewed for inclusive terminology, inclusive images, and inclusivity statements. Two universities accounted for 39.48% of the total number of terms used. The largest majority used only one disability-related term on their website, half used a total of eight or fewer terms, and one university used outdated terminology. Fourteen (58.33%) of the universities included no pictures of people with disabilities *or* adaptive equipment on their website. Only six (25%) had a collegiate campus recreation program-specific statement at their website. On the 30th anniversary of the ADA, the majority of collegiate campus recreation programs assessed in this study had only minimal information for and representation and visibility of students with disabilities at their websites. Several recommendations are advanced to improve upon this.

Key Words: Americans with Disabilities Act, higher education, intramural sports, recreation center, student services, university

INTRODUCTION

Collegiate campus recreation programs are supported by student fees and/or tuition (Mull, Forrester, & Barnes, 2013). Some of the facilities associated with these programs are posh and they are used by colleges and universities as marketing tools (Attwood, 2017). Given their general purpose (i.e., to provide students with physical activity and leisure opportunities), their location within an institution of higher learning, and their source(s) of support, they ought to appeal and be available to *all* students (Lindsey & Sessoms, 2006). However, many segments of the tertiary student population feel excluded, uncomfortable, or unwelcome in collegiate campus recreation programs, including students with disabilities (Hoang, Cardinal, & Newhart, 2016; Islam, 2017).

One indirect indicator of this is that only 43.9% of college and university students in the United States meet the federal physical activity guidelines (American College Health Association, 2018). Reported levels of physical activity among those with disabilities are likely much lower (Carroll et al., 2014), with very low satisfaction and use of collegiate

campus recreation programs being reported by students with physical disabilities (Hodges, 2000; Yoh, Mohr, & Gordon, 2008). This is due in part to a variety of access issues (e.g., inaccessible equipment, programs, services; Cardinal & Spaziani, 2003) and/or a lack of training and awareness among fitness and recreational professionals (Bassett-Gunter et al., 2019; Martin Ginis, Ma, Latimer-Cheung, & Rimmer, 2016).

Among tertiary students with disabilities, Devine (2016) found that institutional and structural factors were the largest barriers to participation. This includes program websites and their messaging. For example, people with disabilities report a lack of intentional messages or invitations being extended to them, which they find dispiriting (Jaarsma, Haslett, & Smith, 2019). Appropriately designed websites and accessible online information can encourage people with disabilities to participate in physical activity (Kosma, Cardinal, & McCubbin, 2005; Martin Ginis et al., 2016).

In 2015, on the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), Young, Ramos, York, and Fletcher (2016) conducted a content analysis of the websites of the 14 collegiate campus recreation programs at the Big 10 universities. These institutions span 11 states including Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Young et al. were specifically interested in critically understanding the inclusivity of individuals with disabilities within those programs. Their research approach was primarily qualitative and enumerative (Deming, 1953, 1975). They found the collegiate campus recreation program websites difficult to navigate, disconnected from the universities' office of disability services, and that information regarding accommodation and inclusion lacked specificity. Most of the information provided was about facility access (e.g., entrances, parking, ramps, swimming pool lifts) rather than programming. The language used at the websites was generally positive, with a person-first perspective.

Building on the work of Young et al. (2016), and now on the 30th anniversary of the ADA (i.e., 2020), the purpose of the present study was to determine the inclusivity and accessibility of collegiate campus recreation programs for students with disabilities, specifically in terms of representativeness on program websites. The present study was conducted in the western United States, specifically Region VI of the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA).

METHODS

Design

This was a cross-sectional, content analysis study of collegiate recreation programs' websites within Region VI of NIRSA. Data were collected during the first half of 2020. The approach taken was primarily quantitative and enumerative (Deming, 1953, 1975).

Sample

Region VI of NIRSA includes Alaska, Arizona, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Northern California, Oregon, Southern California, Utah, and Washington. Within each state/geographical area, a convenience sample of 4-year universities were identified (N = 24). The institutions included: University of Alaska, Anchorage; University of Alaska, Fairbanks; Arizona State University; Northern Arizona University; University of Arizona; University of Hawaii, Manoa; Boise State University; Brigham Young University, Idaho; Idaho State University; Montana State University; University of Montana; University of Nevada, Las Vegas; University of Nevada, Reno; University of California, Berkeley; University of California, Los Angeles; University of Southern California; Oregon State University; Portland State University; University of Oregon; Brigham Young University, Utah; University of Utah; Utah State University; University of Washington; and Washington State University.

Procedures

Content analysis was applied to each university's collegiate campus recreation program's website. Content analysis is an indirect method of studying human behavior through an analysis of human created artifacts and/or communications (Taylor, 2003), in this case websites (N = 24). It is systematic and quantitative (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

Measures

An initial content analysis coding form was developed and then pilot tested on two universities' collegiate recreation program websites prior to full data collection. Once finalized, data were extracted from each program's website. Using the final form, each website was systematically reviewed for the terms: ADA, access or accessibility, adapt, assist, disability, lift, modify or modification, accommodate or accommodation, handicap, inclusive, and wheelchair. Each website was also examined for two types of imagery: Images that included people with disabilities and/or imagery of equipment that was specific to people with disabilities (e.g., modified exercise equipment). Finally, the websites were explored for three types of disability statements: A recreation center specific statement, a link to a university disability services statement, or a link to a university statement.

All data were recorded as frequency counts. Frequency count data were supplemented with observational notes (e.g., interpretive clarification, special considerations/novelties).

Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed (e.g., frequency, percentage). Data were then analyzed using chi-square (χ^2) tests with the level of significance set at the $p \leq .05$ level. As a supplement to each χ^2 test, contingency coefficients (*c*) were computed as a measure of effect size, with values $\geq .30$ thought to be most meaningful (Fleiss, 1981).

RESULTS

The 11 disability-related terms appeared a total of 618 times across the 24 websites. However, two universities accounted for a combined total of 244 (39.48%) of the occurrences, with the range for the entire sample being a low of 1 to a high of 128 (*M* = 25.75, *SD* = 34.89; Median = 8; Mode = 1). Of the 11 terms, "access" (*n* = 132, 21.36%) occurred most frequently, followed by "disability" (*n* = 114, 18.45%), "adapt" (*n* = 89, 14.40%), "inclusive" (*n* = 89, 14.40%), "accommodate" (*n* = 49, 7.93%), "wheelchair" (*n* = 46, 7.44%), "assist" (*n* = 38, 6.15%), "ADA" (*n* = 32, 5.18%), "lift" (*n* = 23, 3.72%), "modify" (*n* = 4, <1.00%), and "handicap" (*n* = 2, <1.00%). The difference in terminology use was significant and large, χ^2 (10, *N* = 618) = 339.53, *p* <.001, *c* = .60.

Images appeared 49 times across the 24 websites; however, the distribution was unequal. Specifically, 14 (58.33%) of the websites had no disability-specific images, which was followed by images of adaptive equipment alone (*n* = 5, 20.83%), people with disabilities and adaptive equipment together (*n* = 4, 16.67%%), and people with disabilities alone (*n* = 1, 4.17%). The difference in types of images was significant and large, χ^2 (3, *N* = 24) = 15.67, *p* <.001, *c* = .63. Furthermore, adaptive equipment (*n* = 33, 67.35%) was significantly more likely to be featured in an image than was a person with a disability (*n* = 16, 32.65%), χ^2 (1, *N* = 49) = 5.90, *p* <.05, *c* = .33.

Across the 24 universities, 3 (12.50%) had no posted inclusivity-related statement or link, 13 (54.17%) had one type of statement, 7 (29.17%) had two types of statements, and 1 (4.17%) had all three types of statements. The difference in the number of types of statements was significant and large, χ^2 (3, *N* = 24) = 14.00, *p* <.01, *c* = .61. Moreover, of the 21 universities that included one or more statements, the most common was a link to a general university statement about non-discrimination (*n* = 18, 75%), followed by a link to the university's disability services statement (*n* = 7, 29.17%), followed by a statement that was specific to the recreation program (*n* = 6, 25%). The difference in the source(s) of the statement(s) provided was significant and large, χ^2 (2, *N* = 31) = 8.58, *p* <.01, *c* = .47.

Other general observations that were recorded include the following. Five (20.85%) universities had web pages dedicated to inclusive or adapted recreation embedded within other inclusivity topics, such as gender. Three (12.5%) universities mentioned Unified Sports, which is a Special Olympics partnership program where Special Olympic athletes play intramurals with students with or without disabilities. Two (8.33%) of the programs had an "Inclusive Recreation Coordinator" position, and one (4.17%) program had an "Inclusion Team Chair."

DISCUSSION

Large variability was observed in the use of inclusive terminology at the 24 collegiate campus

recreation programs' websites, with one university continuing to use the outdated term "handicap". Two universities accounted for nearly 40 percent of the observed frequencies of the 11 terms investigated. Half of the universities had eight or less mentions of any of the 11 terms, with the modal frequency being one term being used one time. Given the findings of this study, and perhaps somewhat ironic, the most commonly used term was "access."

There were 49 total inclusive images across the 24 collegiate campus recreation programs' websites. However, over half of the programs (i.e., *n* = 14, 58.33%) showed neither a person with a disability or a piece of adaptive equipment on their website. Of the remaining 10 programs, three accounted for nearly 60 percent of the images. When images were shown, they were more than twice as likely to show a piece of adaptive equipment than they were to show a person with a disability.

Spencer (2019) stated, "Creating a campus recreation department to meet the needs and desires of all users starts from the mission statements with the goals of achieving the greatest amount of participation and to provide services to the entire campus community" (p. 186). Among the 24 collegiate campus recreation programs' websites, only six (25%) programs had a recreation program specific statement related to inclusivity of people with disabilities. The vast majority of programs had a link to the university's accessibility statement (*n* = 18, 75%) or a link to the university's disability services statement (*n* = 7, 29.17%). The total exceeds 100% because some programs had more than one type of statement available on their website. However, three (12.50%) programs had no statement or link at all, with one other being especially difficult to locate because it was placed under the heading "Disclaimer."

On the 30th anniversary of the ADA, the majority of collegiate campus recreation program assessed had only minimal information for and representation and visibility of students with disabilities on their websites. Appropriate representation and visibility matter (Fraser, 2018). Unfortunately, and particularly when coupled with the results of Young et al. (2016), only a few programs seem to be making an active and intentional effort to promote inclusion of students with disabilities. A concerted effort is needed to address this issue.

Relatively low-cost and quick to implement ideas include highlighting accessibility features, people with disabilities, and adaptive equipment on the program's website. These might appear on either an "Inclusive Recreation" or "Accessibility" page, which can be clearly labeled on the main site navigation page. A map showing accessibility features can also be included. Programs can also create and post an inclusivity statement. Finally, outdated terminology (e.g., "handicap") should be replaced.

Other relatively low-cost suggestions that might require a longer implementation schedule include obtaining guidance and assistance from the university's Office of Disability Services (or the equivalent). This may include developing and offering basic-level disability service staff training, programming, and website design assistance (e.g., Universal Design). Dedicated staff may also offer inclusive one-on-one facility, equipment, and program orientations to students with disabilities. An Inclusive Recreation Program Committee can be formed, with representation from the disability community. Where possible, partnerships may also be forged with outside groups such as Disability Sport & Recreation, International Blind Sports Federation, Move United, and/or Unified Sports/Special Olympics.

Suggestions that have a longer-term implementation schedule and that come at a higher cost include creating and hiring an Inclusive Recreation Coordinator position. This person can be the point person for all of the recommendations, serve as the Chair of the Inclusive Recreation Program Committee, and liaison with others on campus and beyond. Early in their tenure they might be tasked with executing an ADA facility and program audit either individually or in conjunction with an ADA compliance officer available through the university or a state agency. Alternatively, they might hire an independent contractor to assess accessibility and ADA compliance. They can provide staff training and intentionally hire Personal Trainers with experience in the realm of disability, including encouraging professional credentials for staff (e.g., "Certified

Inclusive Fitness Trainer"[1]). They may also write internal and external grants for equipment, facility modifications, and programming.

This study was delimited to include 24 collegiate campus recreation programs within Region VI of NIRSA. The sample was not randomly determined, nor was it large or diverse enough to be fully representative of all collegiate campus recreation programs. On the basis of the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2018), most of the universities included were designated as doctoral granting universities. This parallels the approach taken by Young et al. (2016) who studied the 14 universities of the Big 10. Regardless, future researchers are encouraged to determine the feasibility of studying a more diverse sample of institution types. For those who may be interested in pursuing such work, it is important to know that not all collegiate campus recreation program websites are fully accessible without an authenticated login. This likely is due to student privacy issues associated with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Additionally, the artifact selected to represent inclusivity of individuals with disabilities in this study was program websites. This may not tell the full inclusivity story.

CONCLUSION

To improve the living conditions of and provide more rights and protections for individuals with disabilities, the ADA was signed into law in 1990. Discourse about the ADA's implications on collegiate campus recreation programs has existed for decades (Cardinal, 1992; Fujii & Woodard, 2006; Hodges, 2000; Ross & Phillips, 1995), and the topic has certainly endured (Islam, 2017; Spencer, 2019). At the time the ADA was signed into law, the World Wide Web was also emerging (Berners-Lee & Fischetti, 1999), now, however, websites are ubiquitous (Berners-Lee, 2010). The present study suggests room for improvement in terms of creating inclusive and welcoming collegiate campus recreation program websites for students with disabilities. An appropriately designed, inclusive website can convey important information about accommodations, equipment, facilities, programming, staff training, and more (Fujii & Woodard, 2006). While representation and visibility will not solve all problems, they can serve as a positive catalyst for change (Fraser, 2018). Towards accomplishing these ends, and consistent with the observations of the present study and aims of enumerative research (Deming, 1953, 1975), a number of recommendations have been advanced.

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