

## *Implementation of a Post-Secondary Inclusive Recreation Program*

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### *Abstract*

As individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities become increasingly involved in post-secondary educational opportunities, it becomes the responsibility of the institution to provide inclusive recreation opportunities. This manuscript incorporates Sugermans' (2001) Model of Inclusive Facilitation into an inclusive recreation program for students with disabilities within a post-secondary based recreation program. The program model presented demonstrates a deliberate attempt to address and implement inclusive recreation opportunities for post-secondary students with disabilities outside of the traditional intramural/campus recreation model. The goal of the program is to enable post-secondary institutions to be comfortable and competent in creating inclusive recreation programs for students with disabilities by developing the ability to focus on participants' abilities.

**Keywords:** disabilities, inclusion, recreation program, post-secondary institution, accessibility

## *Implementation of a Post-Secondary Inclusive Recreation Program*

### **Introduction**

Recreation and leisure activities are necessary for a high quality of life for all, including those with disabilities (Dieringer & Judge, 2015). As individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities become progressively involved in recreational activities at all ages and skill levels, it becomes increasingly important for practitioners to organize and facilitate safe and effective inclusive programs. Sugerman (2001) stated "individuals are not interested in participating in segregated programs designed specifically for people with disabilities, but are interested in participating in programs that are inclusive" (p. 166). As persons with disabilities get older, the opportunities for inclusive recreation activities/sports start to differ depending on age and skill level, specifically with college-aged students.

Traditionally, when college students want to participate in recreation/sport activities, they participate in their campus recreation programs, more specifically, they participate in intramural sports (Kampf & Teske, 2013). Campus Recreation departments have the potential to influence the entire campus community either directly or

indirectly. Researcher from the National Intramural-Recreational Sport Association (NIRSA) study on the influence and value of participating in collegiate recreational sports activities found that “participation in recreational sports is a key determinant of satisfaction and success in college” (NIRSA, 2002, p. 9). While including students with disabilities in extracurricular recreational opportunities is not a new concept, at the post-secondary level, many institutions have overlooked inclusive recreation programs for students with disabilities for many years. However, given the importance that campus recreation plays in the development of holistic (intellectual, physical, spiritual, and social) students and the improvement of one’s quality of life (Lower, Turner & Peterson, 2013), providing recreational opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities, becomes much more important.

According to the National Center on Health, Physical Activity, and Disability (2015a), nearly half of adults with disability get no aerobic physical activity and are three times more likely to have a serious chronic disease when compared to individuals without disabilities. Also, generally speaking, students with disabilities participate in extracurricular sports at a lower rate than their same-aged peers without disabilities (GAO, 2013). According to Traci (2009), significant barriers to accessing recreation and sport opportunities continue to exist for individuals with disabilities, including the lack of appropriate equipment, trained staff, and information about accessible programs. As the population of people with disabilities grows, educators, professional recreation administrators and supervisors must improve their services to reach a broader array of people (NCHPAD, 2015b; Scholl, Glanz & Davison, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

There is a crucial need for programs that help college aged students with disabilities to achieve greater self-sufficiency and improved school, work, and community living outcomes (Kunstler, Thompson & Croke, 2013). As of the fact that very little research has focused on both post-secondary institutions and inclusive recreation programs, it is important to start that conversation. Assimilation into college life can be difficult for all students, much more so for students with disabilities. The involvement of students in a college recreation program aids in the integration into the social atmosphere of the university (Kampf & Teske, 2013). In addition, inclusive sports participation among individuals with disabilities has been shown to promote social interactions and healthier lifestyles (Davis, 2011; Machek, Stopka, Tillman, Sneed & Naugle, 2008). By expanding recreation inclusion research to include post-secondary institutions, opportunities arise for college-aged students with disabilities to experience a broader range of recreational and social experiences while in school.

The purpose of this manuscript is to incorporate Sugermans’ (2001) Model of Inclusive Facilitation (see Figure 1) into an inclusive recreation program for students with disabilities within a post-secondary based recreation program. This conceptual paper is divided into four specific areas: (1) provide an overview of the relative literature; (2) using the Model of Inclusive Facilitation, provide a detailed description of the comprehensive facilitation process of the inclusive recreation program; (3) provide information on evidence of success and challenges; and (4) conclusion. The program

model presented here demonstrates a deliberate attempt to address and implement inclusive recreation opportunities for post-secondary students with disabilities outside of the traditional intramural/campus recreation model.

According to Sugerman (2001), the model was created to lead practitioners through a process of facilitating outdoor adventure groups that included people with disabilities. Specifically, the model was designed to enable practitioners to: (a) be comfortable and competent in including people with disabilities in their programs; (b) develop the ability to focus on participant's abilities rather than disabilities; and (c) manage and minimize the impact of a disability on the adventure experience (Sugerman, 2001). While outdoor adventure was not the basis for the current inclusive recreation program created, the foundational tenants of the model provided an excellent road map to guide the authors through the creation and implementation process.

### *Literature Review*

#### **Leisure Education**

The basis for inclusive recreation programming is within the principles of leisure education. Sivan (1997) suggested, "leisure education refers to a lifelong learning process that helps people achieve through socially acceptable leisure activities to their fullest leisure potential and desirable quality of life" (p. 42). There is growing recognition of the value of leisure in all societies and the importance of leisure education. Given the various perspectives on leisure education, this review of literature focuses on the importance of leisure education in relation to enhancing the quality of life of individuals. The underlying assumption of leisure education is that everyone should have opportunities to experience leisure and that leisure contributes to human development, it is important that everyone also have the chance to be educated for leisure (Sivan, 2008).

To engage in leisure is to express our individual essence, including our talents and capabilities, pursue our potential, and experience a variety of positive emotions while we participate in enjoyable and meaningful activities (Kleiber, 2012). Leisure education helps people identify leisure experiences that facilitate building happy, growth-filled, valued lives (Carruthers & Hood, 2011). An important aspect of developing the process of leisure education is incorporating a systems approach. Therefore, it is helpful when providing leisure education to clearly outline a purpose to guide service delivery. One way to offer leisure education that is described in this paper is to provide a balanced and systematic approach to facilitating leisure participation. Offering leisure education services creates opportunities for individuals, regardless of the severity of their limitations, to engage in various meaningful and enjoyable recreation activities (Dattilo, 2015). If participants feel as if they have the freedom and opportunity to engage in recreation activities of their choosing, they are likely to experience a sense of empowerment.

#### **Inclusive Recreation**

Hurd and Anderson (2011) defined recreation as "an activity that people engage in during their free time, that people enjoy, and that people recognize as having socially redeeming

values” (p. 9). Inclusion within recreational activities is important at any level. Dieringer and Judge (2015) created implementation strategies for inclusion of students with disabilities into physical education opportunities and extracurricular athletics. Specifically, they focused on potential barriers to implementation, such as federal and state allocations to public schools, and the importance of collaboration between stakeholders. Dieringer and Judge (2015) also mentioned advocating for students and athletes with disabilities as a positive form of inclusive recreation implementation, specifically “creating disability awareness activities that promote a better understanding of what it means to have a disability, everyone, regardless of ability level, disability, or interest, has the right to be included in organized physical activity” (p. 98).

Miller, Schleien, and Bowens (2010) stated, “inclusive recreation represents a step toward viewing individuals with and without disabilities in an equal manner and eliminating the number of people perceived as “they” (p. 36). In January 2013, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a report that underscored the access to, and participation in, extracurricular athletic opportunities (GAO, 2013). Unfortunately, the GAO found that students with disabilities are not being afforded an equal opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities in public elementary and secondary schools. To ensure that students with disabilities consistently have opportunities to participate in extracurricular athletics equal to those of other students, the GAO recommended that the United States Department of Education clarify and communicate to schools their responsibilities under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, regarding the provision of extracurricular athletics (GAO, 2013). Interestingly, Section 504 regulations are not limited to elementary and secondary schools, it states that students with disabilities at the post-secondary level must be provided with an equal opportunity to participate in athletics, including intercollegiate club, and intramural athletics (GAO, 2013).

As the population of people with disabilities continues to grow within post-secondary institutions, professional recreation administrators and supervisors must improve their services to reach a broader array of people (Scholl, Glanz & Davison, 2006, U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Historically, recreation for individuals with disabilities has been delivered through separated recreation programs (Watcher & McGowan, 2002). The prevailing philosophy held that individuals with disabilities needed separate programs to accommodate lower skill levels, different learning processes, or different physical abilities (Fennick & Royal, 2003). A more contemporary philosophy regarding participation of individuals with disabilities in recreation is inclusion, where individuals with or without disabilities participate in sport and recreation opportunities together. Several well-known organizations exist to facilitate inclusion within sports. For example, the International Federation for Intellectual Disability Sport (INAS), the National Sports Center for the Disabled (NSCD), SPORTS for Exceptional Athletes, the Adaptive Sports Association (ASA), the Special Olympics Unified Sports Program, I Can Do It, You Can Do It!, and most recently, The Commit to Inclusion Campaign. The Special Olympics sums up the concept of inclusion and sport by stating, “Special Olympics is dedicated to promoting social inclusion through shared sports training and competition experiences”

(Special Olympics, 2017, p. 1). These organizations, as well as many others, dedicate themselves to providing inclusive opportunities through sport.

### ***Implementation of Inclusive Recreation Program through the Model of Inclusive Facilitation***

Providing recreational opportunities for students with disabilities is the basis of inclusive recreation. In 1999, the National Recreation and Park Association adopted a Position Statement on Inclusion (NRPA, 1999), the purpose of which was to “encourage all providers of park, recreation and leisure services to provide opportunities in settings where people of all abilities can recreate and interact together” (p. 94). The creation and implementation of inclusive recreation programs at the post-secondary level can lead to a more comprehensive educational experience for all students. The program reviewed in this manuscript was implemented at a large public university in the southeastern United States. The inclusive recreation program was organized, created, and implemented by an academic department within a college of Health and Human Service in conjunction with an inclusive post-secondary educational program (see AILSG) housed within the same college. The college itself has five departments and centers, with approximately 4,235 students, and 136 faculty and staff.

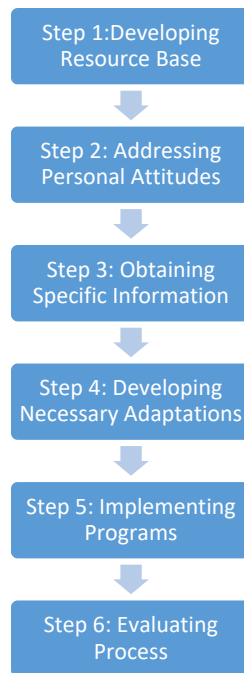
### **The Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth**

The Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth (i.e. Academy) provides a university-based, post-secondary education experience for persons with different intellectual and/or developmental abilities. The Academy, by design, focuses on independence through an inclusive campus program – encouraging social growth and development through real life college experiences. The programs are tuition-based with housing options available on and off campus. The Academy is comprised of two certificate programs that work in conjunction. The initial program, which began in 2009, Academic, Social, and Career, Enrichment (ASCE) program, is designed to provide a two-year foundational base for enhancement of academic, career, and social skills in an inclusive setting. This foundational program has been approved by the Department of Education as a Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP). The Advanced Leadership and Career Development Program (ALCD), which began in 2014, is designed to enhance existing skills in the areas of career development, self-advocacy, leadership and independence, and academic exploration (AILSG, 2017). The Academy has approximately 11 full time faculty and staff, and 41 students (AILSG, 2017).

### **Model of Inclusive Facilitation**

Using the Model of Inclusive Facilitation as a guideline (see Figure 1), the inclusive recreation program was created by faculty, with assistance from local recreational and physical education professionals working within inclusive recreation. The inclusive program was created because students within the Academy program were not participating in the traditional campus recreation model, and expressed a desire to participate in a university organized recreation program.

The process offered here for review is unique in many respects. First, while inclusive post-secondary programs exist at some institutions, a review of current post-secondary programs shows very few provide a recreation based program designed specifically for its students. Second, traditionally these programs are organized and implemented through campus recreation/intramural sports. The current program was created, organized, and implemented by faculty and students within an academic department, outside the scope of the traditional campus recreation/intramural programs.



*Figure 1.* Model of Inclusive Facilitation Sugerman (2001). Adapted from “Inclusive outdoor education: Facilitating groups that include people with disabilities” by D. Sugerman, 2001, *Journal of Experiential Education*, 24(3), 166-172.

While the basic model was followed in the creation of the Academy recreation program, adjustments were made to better fit the newly created post-secondary inclusive recreation program.

### **Developing a Base of Resources**

Sugerman (2001) suggested that the first step of the model involves the development of community resources, including people and written materials (see Figure 1, Step 1). Specifically, this step will form a support structure from which facilitators can gather information and obtain feedback. To implement the inclusive recreation program at the post-secondary level, the program facilitators, both of whom have professional and academic backgrounds in recreation and sport management, gathered information and obtained specific feedback on the most appropriate manner to create and implement the Academy recreation program.

First, the facilitators met with the Academy Director and staff to determine the basic needs of the students, as well as to gauge general interest of the staff and their levels of support (e.g. administrative, facilities, financial, etc.) for the program. Second, a series of meetings were completed with the university's Department of Sport and Recreation, specifically Intramural Sports, Club Sports, and Facilities. The purpose was to learn about their programs and implementation processes, as well as to introduce these departments to the Academy recreation program so that there could be a collaborative work environment as the recreation program grows. This meeting also helped inform the facilitators on how to mirror aspects of the Academy recreation program, such as registration scheduling, etc., with existing campus recreation/intramural sport programs. In addition to the facilitators and Academy staff, two student assistants from the academic department volunteered to help with the initial program. Given that this was the first program of its kind on campus, there needed to be an ongoing relationship with other campus organizations, specifically campus recreation/intramural sports and facilities. To meet this requirement, the student assistants took on a liaison type role between the Academy and on-campus organizations. The idea was to use this relationship to secure space and offer programs in parallel with the standard intramural program offerings.

In addition, to gather additional information, and to develop a larger base of resources, the program facilitators met with local recreational organizations to not only inform them of the programs creation, but to ask about "best practices" they have used with inclusive recreation programs. The facilitators specifically met with local Special Olympics organizations, public parks and recreation special needs programs, as well as Blaze Sports America. Blaze Sports is a nonprofit organization that was created after the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, it offers a variety of sport and recreation programs for kids and veterans with physical disabilities (Blaze Sports, 2017). These additional resources were instrumental when designing the Academy recreation program within a post-secondary setting.

### **Addressing Personal Attitudes**

The next step in the Model of Inclusive Facilitation (see Figure 1, Step 2) involves recognizing, understanding, and confronting personal attitudes about people with disabilities (Sugerman, 2001). For various reasons, society has removed people with disabilities from everyday life, which means most have not had personal contact with anyone who has a disability. As Sugerman (2001) suggested, this step is an opportunity to study attitudes towards disabilities, and to change attitudinal barriers when facilitating groups that include people with disabilities. To complete Step 2 within the post-secondary model, several phases were implemented. First, two student-assistants from the academic department worked directly with the Academy to assist in organizing and implement the recreation program. The student-assistants worked closely with approximately 5-10 Academy students on a daily basis, which provided continuity and a sense of routine between the students and the recreation program. Second, Academy students were invited to the academic departments' student club meetings, additionally; approximately 20 non-Academy students were invited to each inclusive recreation program activity as participants. This phase lasted for one academic semester and

allowed all participants involved (Academy and non-Academy) the opportunity to get to know each other, form friendships, and address any issues. Lastly, as part of the Academy curriculum, students are integrated within the academic departments' curriculum by taking a variety of classes (approximately 2-3 a semester), so non-Academy students regularly interact with Academy students inside and outside of class throughout the semester.

As Sugerma (2001) suggested, the goal is to view people with disabilities as valuable, contributing members of the community, and not as outsiders. By including these various phases of inclusion into the inclusive recreation program, it provided an understanding about the values and beliefs concerning people with disabilities among all participants, which lead to more effective facilitation.

Sugerma (2001) also suggested that it is equally important to learn general guidelines about speaking and interacting with people with disabilities and learning to treat individuals with disabilities as a person first, with the disability as a secondary consideration. Throughout the recreation programs, facilitators, participants, faculty, and staff modeled person-first language. The Academy encourages the practice of person-first language to help people be more thoughtful of the language used.

### **Obtaining Specific Information**

Within this step (see Figure 1, Step 3), the facilitator needs to obtain specific information about the disabilities of the participants, and the implications for participating in the inclusive program. In addition, it is important to gather information from the participants themselves. To complete this task, it is suggested that in-person interviews be conducted with participants to develop a common understanding of expectations and estimate the participant's ability level.

One of the byproducts of this step was determining that not all Academy students have a desire to participate in a recreation program, so it was determined that during the pre-planning process, student recruitment was important to the success of the program. Before the semester began, a baseline survey was created by the facilitators based on formal and informal conversations with students, faculty, and staff within the academic department. The survey was designed to determine the basic needs and general interest of students in the program. The facilitators and student-assistants then attended the Academies first Friday of classes to meet the students, then administer, and collect surveys. Once the surveys had been analyzed through quantitative (e.g., descriptive statistics) and qualitative (e.g., thematic responses) measures, a tentative calendar was created which provides a detailed monthly outlook of the planned events, and is then posted in the Academy study room for students to review. In a perfect world, the Academy recreation program would begin as early as the second or third week of classes. More realistically, with the hectic nature of the beginning of the semester for all students, the program did not begin until around the second month of classes.

Obtaining information about all participants is an on-going process throughout the semester, but so is student recruitment, which is also completed in step 3. Completing



both steps simultaneously is important because it allows the program facilitators to create a baseline of information to plan program logistics (e.g. type and size of facility, equipment & support staff, etc.). Students were also encouraged to participate in recruitment tasks like making flyers and gathering equipment for the program. Through active engagement in the planning period, students experienced a sense of ownership of the program. Academy students who are in their third year were given the chance to earn credit for their Academy classes through taking leadership roles in the recreation programs (e.g. making flyers, gathering kids to go to the event, helping with the planning process, etc.).

Throughout this step, the Academy facilitators were consistently visiting Academy classes to obtain as much information as possible about the participants and to meet with students and generate interest for the program. Also, the Academy facilitator's talked to the students who are just "hanging out" in between classes and let them know recreation programs are happening and where to go to participate. In addition, the facilitators had a full contact list of students and were constantly using technology and social media (e.g. email, texting, Facebook, etc.) to reach out to students.

### **Developing Adaptations**

Adaptations are oftentimes promoted as a means to teach students with and without disabilities in the same setting (Kalyvas & Reid, 2003). Additionally, "adaptations can occur at the micro or macro level and might involve changes in activity, assessment, teaching, or physical and temporal environments" (Kalyvas & Reid, 2003, p. 182). In designing programs for people with disabilities, several types of adaptations may be possible: equipment adaptations, procedural adaptations, skill sequence adaptations, environmental modifications, and program modifications (Schleien, McAvoy, Lais, & Rynders, 1993). Adaptations bridge the gap between the abilities of the participant and the demands of the activity and are an important step in the Model of Inclusive Facilitation (Sugerman, 2001). Sugerman (2001) provided general guidelines relating activity adaptations: (1) adapt on an individual basis; (2) adapt only as necessary; and (3) adapt for functionality (see Figure 1, Step 4).

One of the most important characteristics in effectively implementing any sport adaptation involves positive attitudes from both the facilitator and the participant. Because the Academy recreation program provided a variety of activities, various adaptations were made to accommodate participants. Many times, changes and adaptations had to be made due to the number of participants. For example, if there were not enough students to play flag football, then a variation of a lead-up game would be played such as running passing routes or designing plays. Sometimes adaptations were made to the rules in order for everyone to achieve a certain level of success for all skill levels. For example, during an indoor soccer match, rules were often enforced to limit the impact of better players such as a two touch rule (e.g., only being able to touch the ball twice before having to pass), or designating players that could play in the offside position. Participants often think the adaptation would primarily benefit students with disabilities; however, in the spirit of inclusion, the adaptations that were made often had a positive effect on some of the lower skilled students without disabilities.

### **Implementing the Program**

This step brings together the skills developed in the earlier steps of the model to implement the program (see Figure 1, Step 5). Implementing programs include not only physical integration (e.g., adapting equipment so that an individual with a disability can participate in a program), but also social integration or the development of mutually beneficial relationships between people with and without disabilities (Lais, 1987). Sugerma (2001) added that this could be accomplished through setting group guidelines, modeling appropriate behavior, and developing symbiotic relationships among participants.

Once the semester begins and the Academy recreational program was in full swing, the program provides weekly activities for students and volunteers. A Gmail account was set-up to create a master calendar of events, and from this e-mail the students are contacted weekly about the upcoming events of the week. In addition, a flyer of the month's planned activities was posted in the Academy study room at the beginning of each month. Activities that have been offered to date include: 1) kickball; 2) soccer; 3) word games; 4) bocce; 5) ultimate Frisbee; 6) flag football; 7) game night; 8) archery; 9) dodgeball; 10) movie day; 11) basketball; and 12) bowling. One of the highlights of the program is the end of the semester special event. The end of the semester event during the first semester of the inclusive recreation program was a bowling/laser tag event that included Academy students, several of the volunteers, and faculty and staff from both the Academy and academic department.

As part of the implementation process, recreational "meet-ups" were created, which resembled open recreation. These "meet-ups" were in addition to regularly scheduled programs and were designed to create non-structured recreation opportunities for Academy students. To provide this opportunity a couple of times a week, the student-assistants organized different activities that emulated activities offered by the campus recreation department and were organized in an open green space on campus. The legal aspect of organizing and implementing programs to individuals with disabilities is important to any inclusive recreation program. Similar to other campus recreation/intramural activities, all participants attended an introduction class on the recreation program requirements, as well as signed waivers before they were eligible to participate

To be able to implement any recreational program or activity, volunteers are essential, as they are to the success of the Academy recreation program. Volunteers were recruited directly from students within the academic department through class visitations and majors' club meetings. At the meetings, the facilitators presented the volunteer opportunities as well as a sign-up sheet for interested students. Once a student volunteer list was generated, at the beginning of each week, the facilitators provided updates on the week's activities to the volunteers through emails and texts. The weekly communication provided specific information about the week's programs (e.g. date, time, location, activity, etc.). In addition, the volunteers were always encouraged to bring guests to participate and help program the activities.

Additional students were also recruited to assist with implementation, and they also participated in the activities, which increased the participation from the general student body of the university. This relationship with department students provided the opportunity for the Academy students to participate in other recreation and leisure activities such as tail gating at football games with a known group people, which helped develop social integration and mutually beneficial relationships between people with and without disabilities.

### **Evaluating the Process**

In the last step of the Model of Inclusive Facilitation (see Figure 1, Step 4), the facilitator identifies areas that were strengths in program implementation and areas that need additional attention, with the evaluations being completed on both an informal and formal basis. As Sugerman (2001) suggested, reflecting on these responses, and discussion with group members and other facilitators, can reinforce effective program elements and generate ideas for improvement. In addition, the evaluation process begins to build a stronger base of knowledge, skill, and attitude concerning the inclusion of individuals with disabilities into inclusive programming.

Within the Academy recreation program, various evaluation processes were completed. Once the semester is complete and the students and volunteers have participated in the program, a post semester evaluation process takes place. First, similar to the pre-program survey, a post-program survey was created by the facilitators based on formal and informal conversations with students, faculty, and staff within the academic department, and was given to all participants and student-assistants. Second, led by the program facilitators, the Academy faculty and student-assistants met to discuss the semester's event, as well as begin to plan for the next semester's activities. The planning process looked at what worked and what needs to be improved upon, specific to type of activities offered, when they are offered, and any programmatic and administrative adjustments that needed to be made. Based on the post semester evaluation process to date, certain recommendations have been made by faculty, staff and students. They include but are not limited to: 1) make all faculty and staff available to the Academy; 2) determine the best days/times to attend classes to be able to recruit students; 3) do not just drop in and out of Academy classes, stay and talk with the students to build trust and create friendships, because bonding with the students is the only way some of them will be willing to attempt to participate in the intramural sports program; and 4) begin programming early in the semester, recruit students, volunteer and reserve space early.

Academy student feedback is also very important to the success of the program, and to date, recommendations from Academy students include: 1) finding a more efficient way to communicate (e.g. possibly text vs. e-mail); 2) create programs at different times of the semester so that more Academy and non-Academy students can attend consistently; and 3) invest in supplies to support programs (e.g. actual flags for flag football).

### *Evidence of Successes*

Sport remains a source of personal and social entertainment, but the psychological and physical health benefits associated with participation are very important (Lower, Turner & Peterson, 2013). To that point, sport/recreational activity involvement for students with disabilities provides a unique and rewarding opportunity to benefit from the psychological and physical benefits that comes from participation. The most efficient process to measure success within recreational programs is attendance, and since the inception of the Academy recreation program, attendance (Academy and non-Academy students and volunteers) has increased approximately 5% every semester, with some activities (e.g., soccer, dodgeball, and bowling) reaching 20-25 participants (e.g., Academy & non-Academy students). In addition, the Academy has now placed advertisements for the recreation program within their off-campus recruiting materials, as well as featured the program overseas during study abroad trips to the United Arab Emirates.

### *Challenges*

As with any recreational or sport program, there are going to be challenges. Because this program is working in conjunction with academic programs, there are certain administrative challenges that are present. For example, start-up challenges, because this was and is a unique program not traditionally found within post-secondary institutions, creating and implementing this program was initially difficult because the campus had trouble adjusting to meet the demands of the program and its participants. There seems to be a dichotomy between students who want to participate on a recreational level and those who want to participate on a more competitive level, balancing those desires is difficult. Students in the Academy show-up inconsistently, which makes it difficult to plan activities. In addition, there are many space and time challenges associated with the program. Again, because of the uniqueness of this program and the relatively small size of the participants compared to other university programs, securing activity space is difficult. Often the space needed is already reserved, or the time space is available is not conducive to the Academy participant's schedule. More established campus programs would receive preferential treatment when it came to scheduling, making programming a tough task.

A challenge that faculty and staff overlooked was the social capacity of many of the participants. As an example, many participants are shy and do not enjoy being in large crowds, so having activities during the middle of the day in open green spaces on campus meant students were visible by all students, something Academy students tried to avoid. Based on some of the challenges observed, one could begin to wonder if students felt self-conscious playing in open and crowded areas due to insecurities associated with being novices or unskilled in some of the activities. Perhaps in the future, the program should incorporate smaller group skill building sessions before an open event. The most successful events were smaller ones which involved little to no outside groups and no additional paperwork, unfortunately, this somewhat goes against the inclusion philosophy. Other challenges arose when the program facilitators attempted to include activities off campus that included additional fees and transportation.

## **Conclusion**

Research suggests recreational/intramural sports programs can be a tremendous tool to promote student engagement and social development. Working with Academy students to make their college experience as consistent as a traditional student takes time and commitment from faculty, staff, students and administration.

The program presented is unique in that it was conceived with the express purpose of providing recreational opportunities for students with disabilities, both intellectual and developmental. The hope is that after reviewing this model, post-secondary institutions would feel more comfortable and competent creating and implementing an inclusive recreation program. While there are numerous programs that offer recreational opportunities for students with disabilities, a review of current research could find few that were offered at post-secondary institutions. This program is the basis of inclusive recreation and is providing physical and emotional growth for a group of students who would not have had that opportunity otherwise. As this program grows and becomes more common within the post-secondary community, we believe other institutions can use this example as a model to develop inclusive recreation opportunities for students all over the country.

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### *About the Authors*

**Chris Brown, Ph.D.** Dr. Brown received both his B.S. and M.Ed. in Recreation Administration from the University of Georgia, and his doctorate from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Dr. Brown has worked with a variety of recreation populations (able bodied and students with disabilities) while in school and in my professional and academic careers. He teaches a service learning class where students organize and implement three fundraising events for four different non-profit organizations that work directly with individuals with mental or physical disabilities. Those organizations include the Kyle Pease Foundation, Cherokee County Special Olympics, Acworth Parks and Recreation Special Needs Program, specifically the Horizon League, and KSU's Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth. Dr. Brown, along with Dr. Johnson, began working with the Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth (AILSG) to provide recreation and sport opportunities for their students through a well-organized, inclusive recreation program. Dr.'s Brown and Johnson organized and implemented KSU's first on campus recreation and sport program for students with disabilities, which began in spring 2014.

**John David Johnson, Ph.D.** Dr. Johnson is an Associate Professor of Sport Management at Kennesaw State University. His experience with inclusive recreation started with a student whose physical abilities were limited by cerebral palsy. Dr. Johnson helped the student organize a day hike at Kennesaw Mountain Battlefield for people with disabilities. Dr. Johnson was also instrumental in advocating for Kennesaw State University's challenge course to become more inclusive by adding two universal high course elements as well as 3 universal low challenge course elements. Dr. Johnson also serves on the board of the Kyle Pease Foundation, which promotes success for persons with disabilities by providing assistance to meet their individual needs through sports.

**Ibrahim Z. Elsayy, Ph.D.** Dr. Elsayy is Associate Professor in the Department of Exercise Science and Sports Management, and Executive Director of the Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth, Kennesaw State University's certificate program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Before taking the Academy's leadership role in 2012. Dr. Elsayy was well-known within the International Disability Community. He lead the organizing committee for both the first Arab-American Dialogue on Disability held at KSU in 2009, and the second Arab-American Dialogue on Disability, held in Tripoli, Libya in 2010. He has organized numerous sport, camping, and recreation activities for children and youth with disabilities in his native Egypt, in Jordan, and in the United Arab Emirates. More recently, he created the first

inclusive Study-Abroad program: “Creating Cultures of Achievement through Recreation and Sport”, a collaboration between the Academy and KSU’s Department of Sports Management, which returned for the third consecutive year in 2017 to the Emirate of Sharjah in the UAE. Dr. Elsayy holds a B. S. in Physical Education, and both an MA and a PhD in Physical Education with a specialization in Sports Psychology from Alexandria University in Alexandria, Egypt. He served as Associate Dean, and then Interim Dean of Alexandria University’s Faculty of Kindergarten, and supervised the university’s Early Intervention Center. Classes he has taught include Motor Education, Motor Disturbances, Motor Expression, Modern Attitudes on Motor Skills and The Psychology of Play.