

Final Report of the Physical Activity Subcommittee to the Committee on Educational Policies and Planning

April, 2006

Introduction

The College has a long history of supporting its students' physical development. That commitment is articulated in a variety of places, including such documents as the "Academic Vision Statement" and the Strategic Plan. Perhaps most accurately captured in the "Physical Activity Program Report" of July 21, 2005, the College's general view is that "human movement and physical activity [are] a natural, even necessary, component of a liberal arts education."

The Physical Activity Program (PA), along with the intercollegiate and intramural sports programs, is the primary venue for this type of student development. The PA Program offers roughly 45 courses each year, the vast majority of which bear one academic credit. Students enrolled in PA courses typically receive letter grades at the end of the semester. Students may take unlimited PA courses during their Skidmore careers, but the College Catalogue stipulates that in most cases "physical activity courses may not be repeated for credit."

In the summer 2005, as part of a larger restructuring initiative at the College, the Physical Activity Program was moved from Academic Affairs to Student Affairs. As a consequence of that move, a few issues have emerged that require immediate attention. The Athletic Council asked CEPP to evaluate several of these issues, and, as a result, CEPP convened a subcommittee—the Physical Activity subcommittee—and charged it with the responsibility to:

- 1) Develop a mechanism for ongoing review of the PA Program;
- 2) Consider grading options for PA courses; and
- 3) Consider whether PA courses should bear credit.

The membership of the subcommittee includes two representatives from CEPP, one from the Dean of Faculty's Office (in this case, the Dean of Studies), one from the Curriculum Committee, one member of the faculty from the Athletic Council, the Athletic Director, and one student (chosen by SGA). The subcommittee met four times over the course of the spring semester, 2006.

Review of PA Instructors

Moving the Athletic Program from Academic Affairs to Student Affairs obviously has an effect on the academic evaluation of PA courses. These courses, typically delivered by Skidmore's athletic coaches, bear academic credit, and yet the coaches themselves do not

report to anyone in academic affairs. They report directly to an Athletic Director who does not enjoy faculty status and whose responsibilities fall under the jurisdiction of the Dean of Student Affairs. Thus, the first question explored by the subcommittee centered on what structure should now be installed to ensure proper *academic* oversight of PA courses.

The Physical Activity subcommittee reviewed various structural models aimed at providing academic review of the delivery of PA courses. After considering models from our peer and aspirant institutions, the subcommittee concluded that no single structure is favored. In fact, only two of the ten institutions surveyed even appear to resemble Skidmore's broad structural design. That is, only two institutions—Hobart and William Smith Colleges, and Middlebury—have Physical Activity Programs that report exclusively to the Dean of Student Affairs (see Table 1). We were thus left with little guidance from our peers. The subcommittee then wrestled with a few possible structural models, and, after some debate, settled on one.

The PA subcommittee recommends that CEPP endorse a structure where the Athletic Council, minus the student representatives, is responsible for the review of PA instructors. The PA subcommittee's goal was to ensure representation primarily, though not exclusively, from the academic side of the College, while also acknowledging the need for some athletic voice in the review process. We believe the Athletic Council—whose membership consists of three faculty members, two students selected by SGA, the Dean of the Faculty or his/her designee, the Dean of Student Affairs or his/her designee, and the Athletic Director—includes an appropriate imbalance of academic and student affairs representatives. If we relieve the two students of the responsibility for evaluating the coaches in their capacity as instructors (for obvious reasons), we are left with four representatives from the academic side of the college and two from the student affairs side. The subcommittee believes it is appropriate to maintain that structural imbalance because of the academic nature of the courses.

Specifically, the subcommittee believes that the four members of the Athletic Council who reside under Academic Affairs have the necessary credentials to make academic judgments about the success or failure of a particular instructor or course. Including a member of the Dean of Student Affairs staff and, in particular, the Athletic Director as in the review process also makes sense. The Athletic Director brings to the process unique insight into the qualifications of the PA instructors and the relative success of those particular courses. PA instructors report directly to the Athletic Director, and he/she is able to consider a whole host of issues that may have some bearing on the delivery of PA courses.

The subcommittee recommends that CEPP endorse a proposal mandating the *yearly* evaluation of instructors by the Athletic Council (minus the student representatives).

Credit for Physical Activity Courses

The subcommittee recommends continuing the practice of awarding credit for PA courses. Members of the subcommittee speculated that removing the credit from most PA courses would result in a considerable decline in the number of students enrolling in those courses. If the College remains committed to the importance of developing the body alongside the mind, it seems logical that maintaining the status of PA courses as credit bearing will help advance that commitment. The subcommittee further recommends that the College continue to allow students to take unlimited PA courses (see Tables 2-3).

Grading Options for PA Courses

The subcommittee discussed the current grading structure in PA courses (letter grades) and considered the possibility of changing that structure to a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory system (see Tables 4-5). As part of those deliberations, the coaches themselves were polled, and the desire among those teaching PA courses was to maintain the current practice. The arguments presented by the coaches in favor of maintaining a letter grading scheme included the following:

1. It affirms the academic nature of the courses (and like dance, "movement" is the academic experience)
2. It conveys the seriousness of the program to the community.
3. It ensures that instructors embrace both 1 and 2.
4. It will ensure that those instructors who like to incorporate "academic" exercises into the course can do so with impunity.
5. It underscores that the claim that PA is a legitimate component of a Liberal Arts curriculum.
6. The fear is that if the PA courses become P/F everyone will pass and the class will become "attendance only" as the major requirement.
7. The classes are challenging both mentally and physically (classes differ as to which comprise the greater percentage) and the students meet these challenges with various levels of success and attention. Earning the same grade for those achieving A's or C's would be a disappointment.

The committee members who are in favor of maintaining the current grading system submit the following reasons:

1. A change in the grading system should be considered in the context of all one-credit courses earning regular letter grades. It appears that the PA program is being singled out, and hastily moving to a S/U grading system may be unnecessary.
2. While peer institutions were polled regarding grading policies in their PA programs, there is no data available regarding the aims of these programs or the quality of instruction in the courses at these peer institutions compared to Skidmore. At Skidmore we have intentionally emphasized the health benefits of a

sound physical activity program that stresses the development of individualized exercise programs.

3. There is no evidence that students can bolster their GPAs with PA or any other one-hour course. Even if a student took six PA courses over a four-year career and earned an A in each class, the impact on one's overall GPA would be negligible.
4. Assuming that Athletic Council (minus the student representatives) is to have *academic oversight* of the PA program, it should be the body to initiate a change in the grading schema.

In contrast, a slight majority of members of the subcommittee favor adopting a S/U system for all Physical Activity courses. Among the reasons for adopting a S/U structure, the subcommittee considered:

1. The data (in Table 4) suggests that there is a de facto S/U system in place. That data points to a bimodal grading distribution where the overwhelming majority of grades awarded in PA courses are either in the A range or below C-.
2. Every peer institution the subcommittee contacted maintains a S/U system
3. A few students—especially those on the edge of disqualification—have seemingly used PA courses to boost their GPAs.
4. The role of coaches has changed in the past several years, both at Skidmore and around the country. The professionalization of coaching has forced some coaches (but certainly not all) to devote less time to the teaching of PA courses than was the case when the coaches were hired with faculty status.

In the end, the subcommittee could not come to a consensus on a single recommendation regarding the grading system for Physical Activity courses.

Review of the Physical Activity Program

The subcommittee discussed the need for periodic reviews of the entire Physical Activity Program. The subcommittee recommends that CEPP endorse a plan whereby Athletic Council reviews the PA Program every five years.

Appendix

Data

Table 1: Physical Activity Classes at Peer and Aspirant Schools

Table 2: Physical Activity Information for the Class of 2005 and for the Fall 2005

Table 3: Physical Activity Courses Per Student – Class of 2005

Table 4: Physical Activity Course Grades – Fall 2004 and Spring 2005

Table 5: Physical Activity Grade Statistics, by Gender – Fall 2001 to Spring 2005

Table 1: Physical Activity Classes at Peer and Aspirant Schools

Questions Asked	Bates	Clarkson	Conn College	Hamilton	Middlebury	R P I	Rochester	St. Lawrence	Union	Vassar	Hobart/ Wm. Smith
1. Offer PA classes through Athletics Dept?	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	N O	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES
2. If so, do Coaches teach?	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	N A	NA	YES	NA	SOME	SOME
3. Grading options?	PASS /FAIL	PASS/ FAIL	PASS/FAIL	PASS/ FAIL	PASS/FAIL	N A	NA	NON- CREDIT	NA	PASS/ FAIL	PASS/ FAIL
4. Coaches evaluated for teaching PA classes?	No Eval	NO	Peer review & Student Eval- AD	Student Evals To AD	Student Evals & PE Dir.	N A	NA	NA	NA	Student Evals to AD	NO
5. Cap for # of credits on PA classes?	2 PE Credits	NO	4	2 PE Credits *	2 PE Credits**	N A	NA	NA	NA	2 @ .5 ea = 1	H - 4 @ .5 = 2 WS - no cap
6. Do Varsity Athletes receive credit for sport?	PE Units **	NO	NO	PE UNITS *	1-1 TIME ONLY	N O	NO	NA	NO	NO	NO
7. Do you report to Student Affairs?	NO	TO President	NO, DOF	TO DOF	YES	Y E S	NO	Academic DEAN	NO	NO	YES

- *PE credits/units are required for graduation, no academic credits are earned.
- ** Two PE credits/units are required for graduation, no academic credits are earned.

Table 2: PA Information for the Class of 2005 and for the Fall 2005

Graduates in the Class of 2005	
Total Grads	530
Unique students taking at least one PA course in undergrad career	340
Percent of the Class taking at least one PA course in undergrad career	64%
Duplicated enrollments in PA courses by these 340 students	754
PA courses per students taking at least 1 PA course	2.2
PA courses per Total grads in the Class	1.4
Percent of students taking at least one course (340) who did not play varsity sports	71%

Fall 2005 Term Course Registrations			
	Quality Pts	Credits	GPA
All Courses (including PA)	116085.7	35470	3.273
PA Courses Only	1325.7	357	3.713
Courses without PA	114760	35113	3.268

Table 3: PA Courses Per Student - Class of 2005

PA Courses per Student - Class of 2005		
(Exlcudes TR, W, and WF grades)		
	Students	% of students with at least 1 PA course
1 Course	130	39.8%
2 Courses	98	30.0%
3 Courses	56	17.1%
4 Courses	19	5.8%
5 Courses	8	2.4%
6 Courses	7	2.1%
7 Courses	4	1.2%
8 Courses	5	1.5%
Total Students	327	100.0%
10-Mar-06		
IR		

Table 4: PA Course Grades:
Fall 2004 and Spring 2005

PA Course Grades (Fall 2004 & Spring 2005)			
GRADE	COUNT	PERCENT	
A+	81	9.5%	
A	549	64.3%	
A-	74	8.7%	
B+	37	4.3%	
B	32	3.7%	
B-	12	1.4%	
C+	4	0.5%	
C	12	1.4%	
C-	9	1.1%	
D+	1	0.1%	
D	7	0.8%	
F	9	1.1%	
S	4	0.5%	
AU	11	1.3%	
W	12	1.4%	
Grand Total	854	100.0%	
10-Mar-06			
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Table 5: PA Grade Statistics by Gender: Fall 2001 to Spring 2005

	PA Grade Statistics By Gender Fall 01 - Spring 05					
	M #	M GPA	F #	F GPA	All #	All GPA
Fall 01	130	3.753	193	3.816	323	3.791
Spring 02	184	3.770	225	3.786	409	3.779
Fall 02	130	3.764	192	3.863	322	3.824
Spring 03	179	3.683	223	3.872	402	3.788
Fall 03	145	3.747	215	3.804	360	3.782
Spring 04	185	3.649	226	3.858	411	3.767
Fall 04	136	3.703	199	3.925	335	3.837
Spring 05	207	3.436	285	3.878	492	3.696