

## **Charting the Course with Student Majors Beyond the Curriculum**

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Extra-curricular and co-curricular activities in your health and physical educator preparation program can extend the knowledge, values, and experiences of your student majors. The purpose of this article is to share an approach to working with students majors outside the curriculum. This four-pronged approach helps student majors engage with the HPE field in mutually beneficial ways beyond the classroom. Centering the student majors clubs around the four prongs of 1. Fellowship, 2. Advocacy, 3. Professional Development, and 4. Service can help students consider the varied ways they can work with one another, work within their campus community and school partners, and to engage with the profession in ways that are not often demonstrated explicitly in their program curricula.

**Conclusion:** Opportunities for student fellowship is beneficial in many ways including lasting friendships, stress management, comradery, peer mentoring, leadership opportunities, networking, identity with the institution and retention in the program. Advocacy activities allow students to extend their voice and build confidence. Professional development for preservice teachers can be an important part of professional preparation and can be facilitated through student majors clubs. Through service, students have valuable experiences and learn skills that are directly reflected to their future work.

**Keywords:** extra-curricular, fellowship, advocacy, professional development, service learning, majors club

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Extra-curricular and co-curricular activities in your educator preparation program can extend the knowledge, values, and experiences of your student majors. Higher education health and physical educator preparation programs and their respective state professional associations can work with student majors to help facilitate learning beyond their college/university curriculum. Bert and Richards (2018) support the idea of faculty taking an active part in the socialization of prospective health and physical education (HPE) teachers. Dove (2022) takes that a step further to suggest that HPE clubs can help students build strong connections with other students, get guidance from mentors who can help with academic and social progress, and develop stronger relationships with faculty. Recruitment is also emphasized as an important function of a majors club according to Parkes and Holden (2020a). Hellison and colleagues (2000) advocate for university student involvement in the communities they serve. Specifically,

service learning is an area where HPE majors can gain valuable experience and at the same time provide some much needed service to the community if it is structured to do so. Majors clubs can also provide opportunities for students to benefit through learning about advocacy, how government influences the field, and networking with other professionals through specific advocacy activities (Watterson, Wells, Claxton & Grube, 2018).

This article will illustrate how college or university programs can utilize a four-prong approach of student major engagement to promote extra-curricular involvement in their prospective field. A secondary emphasis of this article is how your majors club can link with your state professional organization in creating additional opportunities to engage with the profession. HPE educator preparation programs might consider these four prongs as a way to frame the mission of their own student majors clubs: 1) Fellowship, 2) Advocacy, 3) Professional Development, and 4) Service. Each of these areas will be explored with examples of implementation, benefits, and outcomes for students. The first prong addresses fellowship. Activities outside the program that are student-led can help peers develop a sense of community. This can also lead to the development of the group by facilitating positive relationships that help students better engage with group projects, co-teaching in internships, leading advocacy, professional development, and service initiatives on campus and in the community. The next three prongs, specifically, are layered, complex, and overlapping. Complexities include setting the stage for these experiences that often requires extensive planning, and in some cases, additional funding. This is where faculty work together with their students outside of their classes, perhaps within the context of the majors clubs, or in the case of smaller programs that may come in the form of small group or independent work. The following sections further explain each prong and provide practical examples for other HPE programs to consider.

## **2. FOUR-PRONGED APPROACH**

### **2.1 Fellowship**

Fellowship includes the social interactions that accompany both formal and informal gatherings held by the members of a student majors club or association. Fellowship is an important aspect of any student club or association providing students who have common interests the opportunity to interact and have fun. Examples of planned social events include: picnics, tailgating at a sporting event, hiking, skiing, bowling, rock climbing, escape room participation, bon fires, ropes course, beach trips, paintball, scavenger hunts, hitting the town after an event, sports competitions, attendance at sporting events, kayaking, dance events, etc. This type of fellowship helps students get to know each other and form social connections. Fellowship

extends beyond the boundaries of club activities when students gather informally to have fun, form study groups, or conduct peer advising. Fellowship also exists in the virtual world on social media. Students quickly organize accounts for communication as well as publication of photos and videos.

Long-lasting relationships are a potential outcome of club membership and may have the greatest impact on participants' satisfaction with their college or university (Nolen, et al., 2021). Research suggests that fellowship helps students gain a sense of identity with their profession and cultivate stronger bonds with their program, department, and university (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009).

The fun and fellowship of club events promotes beneficial social interaction that builds friendships and networking potential as well as enhanced social and leadership opportunities. The comradery of students who are all experiencing similar academic and social pressure is bonding and beneficial. Informal mentoring is commonplace, where advanced students advise newer students on course selection, strategies for internship, and even offer personal advice. Students can regularly plan sport or recreational activities alongside club meetings to enhance the fun factor. Club members are more likely to attend a research symposium if it includes a competitive game of disc lacrosse or pizza. Research suggests that fun in the workplace promotes retention, and employee performance (Tews, et al., 2013). It stands to reason that similar outcomes are happening with student club participation. When a student is in academic jeopardy, suggesting membership in the major's club may be the lifeline that pulls them back to safety. Offering opportunities for student fellowship is beneficial in many ways including lasting friendships, stress management, comradery, peer mentoring, leadership opportunities, networking, identity with the institution and retention in the program.

## **2.2 Advocacy**

Advocacy initiatives can be important to the development of preservice teachers. Finding meaningful opportunities for students to engage with advocacy for the profession can help students see the importance of that work, and to recognize its place as a way to consistently seek to educate others and to seek resources. An important advocacy activity that many programs engage in is through the national Speak Out! Day facilitated by SHAPE America and held annually in Washington, D.C. This is a lobbying event designed to have HPE advocates gather to represent their state and their profession, meet with members of Congress from their state, network with other HPE professionals, and advocate for legislation that advances our mission (Watterson, et al., 2018). Majors clubs can work toward raising funds and writing for internal grant funding to cover travel costs. Often

colleges/universities have funding sources that can aid in student travel costs such as the student government organization. Once there, the students, as preservice teachers are quickly engaged with how they can influence legislation impacting health and physical education. It can be a meaningful experience in the career journey for a beginning teacher to sit in the office of a member of congress and educate them on the benefits of quality HPE in schools and communities in their state.

Another advocacy opportunity for students is helping to recruit future students to the major and profession. Student majors can help sell the major and profession to their peers, often in more convincing ways than the faculty! What better way to represent the major at an Open House event than to show off the students and let them celebrate the virtues and qualities of the program and profession. Finally, another on campus activity that helps with visibility for HPE is an ambassador program. Many colleges/universities employ students who personify the dedication and commitment for educating future leaders in teacher education. HPE representatives are easily in a position to advocate for educator preparation as well as the importance of HPE in schools. By being visible on campus as representatives of the program or major, they are uniquely positioned to influence others, be it prospective students who visit the campus or other students who may be interested in a career in teaching. Advocacy activities allow student majors to extend their voice and build confidence.

### **2.3 Professional Development**

Professional development (PD) for preservice teachers is a critical component on the career pathway for preservice teachers. Standard 6 of the National Standards for Initial Physical Education Teacher Education (SHAPE, 2017) specifically indicates that they should “exhibit professional ethics and culturally competent practices” and “seek opportunities for continued professional development”. What this looks like in an educator preparation program differs based on opportunities afforded to them by faculty within their program. There are several meaningful ways in which preservice teachers can engage with professional development to both enhance their professional preparation as well as augment the experience as a student major. Regardless of PD structure, it is important that HETE/PETE faculty support the continual learning and development of teacher candidates as they move from being a preservice to an in-service teacher (Fan, et al., 2021).

Preservice teachers can become part of the regular presentation proposals for state, regional, and national conferences. In this, the experience of faculty in the major can greatly contribute to the likelihood of proposal acceptance through collaborative writing or mentorship for student major-designated sessions. If preservice teachers present as a student

major, they are potentially more likely to present as an in-service teacher and thus much more likely and confident in continuing to seek those opportunities once out in the teaching world. It might be beneficial, as well, to have those aspirations written into the programmatic goals within educator preparation programs. For example, HPE educator preparation programs can commit to submitting proposals every year at the state level. Each year's conference submissions could include current student majors along with faculty within the major as well as including recent alumni or the program to marry aspirations for those preparing for and in the "real world" of teaching.

Professional development opportunities can also be woven into coursework for the major as a way of building content knowledge and pre professional skills. From here, student majors clubs can integrate these student experiences. For example, adventure-based learning curriculum can be used as a foundation for team building for beginning of the year meetings or as part of preparation for student major competitions at state, regional, or national conferences. The *SuperStars*<sup>™</sup> competition is an example of how club cohesiveness can be highlighted through friendly competition with other student majors clubs from across their home state. It is also important to note that opportunities to participate in professional development should go beyond traditional activity-based learning. Content areas for PD might include Reproductive Health and Safety, Suicide Prevention, Childhood Sexual Abuse education, or Nutrition and Physical Activity education. Professional development for preservice teachers, regardless of format, can be an important part of professional preparation and can be readily facilitated through student majors clubs.

## **2.4 Service**

As mentioned already, service learning is becoming an important part of the college/university experience for many. Additionally, service learning is also regarded as a High Impact Educational Practice that can contribute to persistence and grade point average, higher student engagement and stronger student-faculty interaction (Kuh & Scheider, 2008). Opportunities for service can come in a range of ways, sometimes tied to a course, or it can be an activity that is led by the majors club. Regional school partners often need, and will sometimes seek out, help with school events such as festivals, fairs, and field days. This direct service has great outcomes for the children in the region and school-university partnerships. Further, it promotes the college/university, the students, and the field in a positive light. Another service activity is "Parents Night Out". The majors club can organize an evening where faculty and staff can bring their children to the gym on campus for approximately three hours of fun activities led by the student majors. The parents can enjoy a night out while their children are

engaged with fun physical activity and provided with healthy snacks during the evening. This provides a nice service to the campus community and serves as a fundraiser to help with other club activities such as funding for student travel. The service emphasis gets the majors club to actively seek out ways to engage with the school partners, such as helping to assemble and repair equipment that will be used in the physical education classes at the school, or cleaning the equipment room and teaching spaces. These service activities don't just benefit the local children and schools, but are mutually beneficial to our students as well. Students learn valuable skills and have valuable experiences that are directly reflected in the nature of the job they are preparing for.

### **3. DISCUSSION**

Student clubs and associations can offer students a cohesive unifying identity. Research on athletes who participate in team sports vs individual sports found that embracing a team ethos is beneficial to overall mental health (Pluhar et al., 2019). Like team sports, a club or association to some extent, promotes unity and a feeling of belonging. Embracing a "team" identity can help members better deal with stress, anxiety and other mental health issues. Knowing that you have friends nearby who can relate to your academic and social pressures while offering support can be extremely beneficial in getting through difficult challenges as a young adult.

Membership in a student club may be especially helpful for first generation students. A student club can be a place where there are opportunities for peer and faculty mentoring that makes a meaningful difference in the life of a first-generation student (Padgett, et al., 2012). These same students may provide "reverse mentoring" to their peers and faculty when they are engaged with an internship. A first-generation student's perspective and understanding of K-12 grade students' and their family culture can be especially insightful.

A strong student club or organization fosters student relationships with each other and to their profession. Volunteering for events in the community and engaging with club sponsored professional development has long term benefits for the university. College/university Advancement and Development offices understand the benefit of alumni who were engaged in clubs and organizations as undergraduates. Students who have a positive experience as undergraduates and remain socially connected to people they met in college are more likely to donate back to their alma mater. Those who perceive themselves as being successful in their professions are also more likely to donate (*The Essential Guide to Alumni Giving and Fundraising*, 2022). The investment a program and faculty make into a student club may glean rewards in the future in the form of alumni donations.

It is worth noting that an ethos of professional development may emerge during student majors club activities. The student club experience is unique in that it is typically student lead and that students work together in groups on different projects and events. Students engage in fellowship, advocacy, professional development and service. As students work together and with professionals in the field, their standards and expectations for professional practice are calibrated. They watch their peers take on various responsibilities with varying outcomes. They witness creative problem solving, they see style and personality come to life. They learn their capacity for hard work and the payoff of going the extra mile. These experiences provide students with tools that will help them not only become strong practitioners but also advance the profession.

Student club participation has the potential to enhance personal relationships between students and faculty, strengthening bonds to each other, the program, and the university. Skills learned as a student while participating in service activities and advocacy can be called upon when opportunities arise in the future promoting positive change in the profession and the community. Life-long participation in professional development is a value that enhances professional practice and growth. Through the examples illustrated through these four prongs of a student majors club, opportunities are created for students to engage with one another and their discipline to grow and learn beyond the curriculum.

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### **4.2 Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### **4.3 Contributions of Authors**

DG-review of literature; wrote Introduction and sections on Advocacy and Service.

AS-review of literature; wrote section on Fellowship and Discussion.

SL-review of literature; wrote section of Professional Development.

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