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# We Want to Play Too

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## **We Want to Play Too**

by Peter Titlebaum, Kate Brennan and Tracy Chynoweth

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that persons with disabilities be integrated to the maximum extent possible, and that these persons cannot be excluded from participation. Despite the size of the population, intramural directors need to be proactive in this area, and operate within compliance of the law that requires schools to make recreational facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. Industry leaders agree that the benefits of intramural sports are vast and that they should be provided to everyone. Intramural sports help many students become part of the college community.

Forming an alliance with the Disability Services on campus, the first step, is the most vital aspect of making these programs successful. This relationship is an important aspect of meeting the ADA mandate of making programs viable, and can benefit the entire campus community.

The ADA requires that sports agencies modify programs, facilities, or services to allow individuals with disabilities to participate without causing an undue burden on the agency and undue expense. Modification is the key to this compliance.

It is important to remember the difference between what can be done, and what must be done. Even with the best of intentions, it is impossible to accommodate everyone but modified games can be more inclusive. Program facilitators can use their imagination to modify rules to get even more students involved, which is the ultimate goal. Beginning a program like this can be a challenge but the long-term impact can be wonderful. Besides increasing compliance with the ADA, the program can be beneficial to persons with and without disabilities.

**D**ESPITE efforts spawned by the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1992, there is still a need to increase the participation of people with disabilities in the collegiate recreational sports setting. The ADA requires that persons with disabilities be integrated to the maximum extent possible, and that these persons cannot be excluded from participation. It is

important to understand the regulations, since many academic communities might not have enough students with disabilities to provide exclusive adaptive recreation programs. One of the goals of the ADA is to make existing programs, including intramural programs, more inclusive.

It is easy to inadvertently ignore a smaller population of students with disabilities. Obviously the larger the population, the more imminent the need for programs and services. However, intramural directors need to be proactive in this area despite the size of the population, and they need to operate within compliance of the law. The law requires schools to make recreational facilities accessible to persons with disabilities, but what is the point if students with disabilities cannot take part in the intramural sports within those facilities? Sports can and should be modified to encourage participation of all persons.

“The goal in recreational programming is to provide everyone with an opportunity to select from a variety of activities; then, to assist participants in gaining a positive experience as the outcome” (Mull, Bayless, Ross, Jamieson, 1997, p. 4-5).

Industry leaders agree that benefits of intramural sports are vast and that they should provide these to everyone. Intramural sports help many students become part of the college community thus by not being inclusive, we are hampering some students' college experience. Participation enhances any student's experience by likely increasing social interaction, physical activity, and mental well-being. No student should be deprived of these benefits.

The intramural director who takes a proactive approach to make the ADA mandate and intramurals programs viable, will work to enable more persons with disabilities to participate. The first step is to form an alliance with Disability Services office, found on every campus to serve the needs of disabled students. By arranging a meeting with the director of the program and discussing a plan for ongoing communication, this relationship is the most vital aspect of making these programs successful and can benefit the entire campus community.

It is understandable if intramural directors with full schedules might possibly discount students with disabilities. If students are not asking for attention, then a staff person might think that the current programs are sufficient and that they are doing a successful job. However, like other students, many disabled students also desire and need to be physically active. That is where the office of Disability Services comes into play. It can contact any student who qualifies for services using confidential information on record, which the intramural director cannot have access.

Disability Services can also be a non-intrusive place where a student with a disability can gain information before actually signing up to participate in an

athletic program. Providing information allows students with disabilities to have the opportunity to make intramurals more inclusive.

The next step is to increase publicity on campus about intramural programs. Getting any participants can be difficult for intramural programs and just putting up flyers announcing new programs for disabled students may not be enough. An intramural director will probably have to use other techniques such as word of mouth or campus television to promote these programs. Since it is easy to modify games, there is no reason for a shortage of players. Some students without disabilities might even find modified games more fun than the other games.

While intramural directors try to comply with ADA regulations by modifying some games, they face a problem. As with any program, budgetary restraints are a concern. New activities could require new equipment, possibly new staff members or training for the current staff. Setting up this type of program is not easy, but it may not be as challenging as you might think. There are ways that a director can modify existing programs to keep active participants involved, while keeping expenses to a minimum. The ADA requires that sports agencies must modify programs, facilities or services to allow individuals with disabilities to participate without causing an undue burden on the agency, including undue expense. Modification is the key to compliance and the way to prevent undue expense.

Something as simple as some slight rule changes can encourage inclusion in existing programs. Examples of modified sports include inner-tube water polo, wheelchair-based ultimate Frisbee or basketball. Better still are games that require simple rule changes to equal the playing field for persons with disabilities. For example, volleyball can be more inclusive if played on a tennis court and everyone is required to sit on the ground as opposed to standing. While all players are allowed to scoot around, they must be sitting when they hit the ball. This way, despite physical disabilities, everyone is impaired. Some inventive rule changes like this can create a more inclusive intramural program at little or no extra cost.

It is important to remember the difference between what can be done and what must be done. Even with the best of intentions, it would be impossible to accommodate everyone, but modified games can be more inclusive. While it might not be possible to include everyone, but it is possible to include more people than are presently taking part. Moreover, it is wise to think of this as an ongoing process. An intramural director cannot change the whole program to be 100 percent inclusive in one day or by one action. It is a gradual process. Hopefully, after they know how to start, directors will strive to continue to improve their programs through innovative and creative ideas.

After the word is out and participation is rising, more games can be added or rules changed. The purpose of this program is not to create segregation of persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities, and this should not be thought of as a new league for persons with disabilities. Ideally, programs make an effort to increase interaction between the two populations, and to better adhere to ADA standards. Rule changes can satisfy both of these requirements. However, this is only the first step. After these changes are implemented, many more modifications can be made. Program facilitators can use their imagination to modify rules. Not only will they often have insight, but also a director can utilize a committee of students to assist in the process. This gets even more students involved, which is the ultimate goal.

Beginning a program like this can be a challenge but the long-term impact can be wonderful. Besides increasing compliance with the ADA, the program can be beneficial to persons with and without disabilities alike.

### **Websites that pertain to the concept of Adaptive Recreation**

Colleges or Universities that offer recreation and/or athletics for disabled students:

- [www.uww.edu](http://www.uww.edu)
- [www.uic.edu](http://www.uic.edu)
- [www.arizona.edu](http://www.arizona.edu)

The following organizations located around the country, offer activities for disabled individuals, and may be a great resource for equipment and supplies, as well as an avenue for personnel who may be able to assist in programming:

- [www.lakeshore.org](http://www.lakeshore.org)
- [www.califmall.com/SP\\_WC02](http://www.califmall.com/SP_WC02)
- [www.socalhoops.com](http://www.socalhoops.com)
- [www.chl.ca](http://www.chl.ca)
- [www.ccspace.ca](http://www.ccspace.ca)
- [www.wsusa.org](http://www.wsusa.org)
- [www.mysticmissile.com/cruisers](http://www.mysticmissile.com/cruisers)
- [www.excaliburfencing.on.ca](http://www.excaliburfencing.on.ca)
- [www.ncsd.org](http://www.ncsd.org)
- [www.nwba.org](http://www.nwba.org)
- [www.wheelchairnet.org](http://www.wheelchairnet.org)

The following magazines contain articles about various adaptive opportunities and activities. Further, there are a number of advertisements, as well as program specific promotional materials, that may be useful to beginning pro-

grams. Many medical supply companies advertise through these and may be helpful when looking to purchase equipment such as wheelchairs:

- Sports 'N Spokes (800-424-8200)
- Palaestra (309-833-1902)
- New Mobility (215-675-9133)
- In Motion (800-233-6263)
- Sci Life (Spinal Cord Injury Assoc.) (800-962-9629)

The following books contain a number of activities that may help to stimulate creativity among programmers of adaptive recreational activities:

- Including Students with Disabilities in General Physical Education by Martin Block, ISBN 1-557-66-463-3.
- Creative Play Activities for Children with Disabilities by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation, ISBN 0873229339.

## REFERENCES

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