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Leaving a Legacy: Empowering Students to Give Back

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Leaving a Legacy: Empowering Students to Give Back



Honors Thesis

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Department: Health and Sport Science

Advisor: Peter Titlebaum, Ph.D.

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Abstract

Most college universities struggle to convince alumni to give back to their former institutions. Currently, only 19.9% of college alumni give back to their former colleges (Alumni Factor, 2018). Despite the amount of time and energy that schools invest in their students, many of the students are not making any sort of commitment in return. However, there is a solution. If college programs found ways to create avenues for students, both current and former, to give back outside of just university general funds, they could see an increase in student giving from both parties. While there is a notion that college-aged students are opposed to giving, there is evidence to suggest that, if the students are empowered and made aware of the importance of giving, they are more than willing to give their time, energy, and even money back to the programs that helped them along the way.

Dedication

To my parents, who have always pushed me to be the best student, and person, I can possibly be.



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Introduction

When writing this thesis, it was written with the intention of being published in the journal *Athletic Business*. The reasoning behind this intention was because there was a desire share these findings with those in the field. If this information was just published in a thesis manuscript, it would be difficult for a wider audience to access it easily. By getting the thesis published in *Athletic Business*, it can easily be accessed and received by professionals in campus recreation, teachers in Sport Management programs, and other professionals who might find it helpful. The idea of fundraising and giving back is critical to organizations and collegiate institutions, and it is critical that they are made aware of the options they have available to them. By submitting this thesis for publishing, it is being made more easily available to those it can impact most.

Student Giving

According to Giving USA (2018), the majority of all donations, whether collegiate, charitable, or from somewhere else, come from one of four sources: foundations, bequests, corporations, and individuals. Combined, these four groups donated \$410.02 billion in 2017. While each source accounted for major contributions toward this total, one group donated more than the rest. The group that donated the most was individuals, who contributed \$286.65 billion of the \$410.02 billion, roughly 70%. Despite the high percentage of individuals who are willing to give monetary donations, many of those individuals are not giving back to their former universities.

Currently, 19.9% of college alumni reported giving money back to their former institutions (Alumni Factor, 2018). While this is an increase from the 9% reported in

2013, it is still a relatively small percentage. There are various reasons why some students give back and others do not. One of the biggest reasons why fewer alumni are giving back is the cost of tuition. In the past, alumni “received an experience that taught them how to think, helped them form lifelong relationships, and prepared them to live and succeed after graduation. For many, this included job training” (Allenby, 2014). Many students felt that the cost of trading money for the college experience was unequal, which pushed them to give back. This is no longer the case. Tuition rates have increased by 80% in the last decade while federal aid has not; meaning students are paying more out-of-pocket or taking out larger loans (Allenby, 2014). Alumni are now overwhelmed with what seems like insurmountable debt that will take years to pay off. Since alumni have given so much already, they do not see how they could possibly give more. While this thinking is flawed, it is prevalent among alumni (Allenby, 2014). In order to correct this thought process, there is a need to give students a better way to invest back in the organizations that invested in them. Colleges need to increase student giving, and one department that could assist with this task, because of their presence on college campuses, is campus recreation.

Campus Recreation Investment

According to the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA), collegiate campus recreation departments employ between 49 and 250 students, with an average of 130 student workers (R. Guzman, personal communication, December 11, 2018). Many campus recreation departments spend hundreds of hours investing in their student workers, and not just through training. A survey conducted by Stidham and Titlebaum (2017) asked 27 universities across the United States about the approaches

they take toward student development. Of these 27 universities, eight of them stated that they put heavy investment in their student development. This kind of involvement included helping students write their resume and cover letter, providing practice or mock interviews, issuing mandatory staff training, encouraging students to investigate their Career Services department, and promoting the attendance of campus recreation conferences such as their state conference or NIRSA Student Lead-On (Stidham & Titlebaum, 2017). Outside of the universities that put a heavy focus on student development, nearly all of the programs indicated that they incorporated some type of leadership training in their staff routine and urged their student employees to attend professional conferences if possible. This focus on staff training not only helps students grow in their role within campus recreation, but it also prepares them for the professional workforce.

While some might be surprised at the effort put forth by campus recreation departments to develop their students, many within the industry feel it should be a main priority. Eric Hunter, the Director of Campus Recreation at the University of South Florida, said, “I think the goal of all of us should be to graduate students who are capable of entering the workforce and have the skills that set them apart from other people when they go out there in the real world.” (Goode, 2016). Micah Walters, former Associate Director for Facilities and Operations at Clemson University and current West Coast Regional Sales Manager at Mondo USA, added, “I think it’s a disservice to our university if campus recreation isn’t focused on the development of students as a holistic person” (Goode, 2016). There is a desire within the realm of campus recreation to invest in student

workers and prepare them for life after college, regardless of whether the students choose to enter the field of campus recreation or not post-graduation.

Missed Opportunity

Despite the desire and effort by campus recreation to invest in student workers, there does not appear to be any avenue for the students to give or invest back in campus recreation. Part of this is due to the lack of emphasis on legacy and giving back during training. The aforementioned Stidham and Titlebaum (2017) study showed multitudes of benefits provided by campus recreation training, such as resume work and conference attendance, but none of those benefits related to giving back to the institution.

Departments like campus recreation are in a position where they have the opportunity to mold students and help them grow through the various types of training they provide.

One of the training sessions they provide could show students how to give back.

Departmental training can introduce students to the importance of giving back and leaving a legacy while they are still in school. However, in order for this to work, professional staff need to mirror the training; they have to be willing to give back as well. Professional staff members need to be willing to set an example by giving their own time, energy, or even money. The students will be more willing to buy into the concept of giving back if those teaching it partake in it as well (Titlebaum, 2018). Whether it be by donating to an alumni fund related to the department or by running one of the after-school programs, the professional staff have to show that they buy into what they are teaching.

While there are ways for alumni to give back to their universities as a whole, there are fewer avenues for alumni to donate to individual or specific departments. Like many other individual departments, campus recreation appears to have no means by which their student workers, past and present, can give back. This is a missed opportunity. With the investment that campus recreation puts into their employees, they could easily create a program for the workers to invest back. The program would not require a monetary donation, but instead could require their time and energy. Additionally, it does not have to be introduced to students after graduation; it could be incorporated into training, so they are introduced to it from the beginning. While instituting such a program might sound challenging, there is a simple solution. Student workers could be encouraged to invest back into a program many campus recreation departments already feature: summer camp programs.

Why Summer Camps?

Summer camps might not be what comes to mind initially when one thinks of investing back into the university. However, these camps could be one of the easiest ways in which to convince students to give back. Many students gain some sort of valuable training or opportunity because of their work within campus recreation, and they want other individuals to have the same experiences and opportunities. Student workers could create such an opportunity while simultaneously investing back in campus recreation through creating a scholarship fund. Student workers could help raise money for a summer camp scholarship fund. This fund allows children to attend camp who otherwise would not be able to afford it. While asking students to donate when they are still working could be a questionable decision, it would provide an avenue for former student

employees to give back to a department that invested time in them, while also helping children enjoy recreation much like they did. If this is the idea programs choose to follow, they need to know where to fundraise, why it is worth starting a scholarship fund, and how to take advantage of the desire that some student workers will have to invest back in campus recreation.

Collegiate Summer Camps

There are around 4,500 members within the NIRSA organization (NIRSA, 2018). Of the 4,500 members, 622 members are collegiate institutions themselves. Despite this large number of collegiate institutions, no mention of camp scholarships resulted in the conducted research of NIRSA's website. In order to learn more about collegiate recreation centers and their associated programs, seven different universities with summer camps from six different conferences were contacted. The seven universities contacted included: Clemson University, Mississippi State University, Texas Christian University, University of Arizona, University of Cincinnati, Colorado State University and University of Dayton. Of these seven schools, the only two colleges with summer camp scholarship programs were Colorado State University and Clemson University. Colorado State had a rather extensive scholarship program, but the department interviewed at Clemson could give little information because a different campus organization handled their scholarships.

Although every school interviewed but two lacked a summer camp scholarship program, a few of the programs had attempted to implement a similar system. These attempts ultimately failed or were abandoned, but the universities did indicate that there was an

interest in a scholarship program. A variety of reasons contributed to why these programs had not implemented a scholarship program. Some universities indicated that their summer camp program was its own department. This meant that the camp program did not receive much, if any, additional funding from the school and relied upon the profits from the camp fees to stay afloat. If they were to give certain camp slots free, they would be cutting into their profit. Other universities stated that their camp programs often filled up, and they had a waitlist for participation. Of the programs that attempted to create scholarships, their initial ideas failed to leave the planning stage or were scrapped when it came to determining scholarship criteria. These universities did not know how to determine who won the scholarship if multiple families applied. Some proposed criteria based on income included having the parents write an essay explaining why the camp would be beneficial for their children, or even having the children write their own essay. Without knowing which criteria would work best, the universities scrapped the whole scholarship program.

Summer Camp Benefits

Despite the lack of summer camp scholarships within collegiate recreation, there is still potential to be a positive addition to the summer camps. This is because there are many benefits children can receive from attending a camp. According to a study conducted by Philliber Research Associates and the American Camp Association (ACA), there are numerous benefits of attending a camp (Burkhardt et al., 2005). Researchers contacted over 5,000 families who had attended 80 different ACA-accredited camps. For this study, the children who attended that camp, and their parents or guardians, filled out a pre-camp survey, a post-camp survey, and a six-month follow-up survey. The overall

results of the survey showed growth in several key areas: spirituality, environmental awareness, adventure and exploration, social comfort, friendship skills, values and decisions, peer relationships, self-esteem, leadership, and independence (Burkhardt et al., 2005). According to the campers' responses, 96% said going to camp helped them make new friends, 94% reported that camp allowed them to meet other children who were different from themselves, 92% felt a boost in self-esteem because of camp, and 74% were able to try things they initially feared (Burkhardt et al., 2005). What this study demonstrates is that there are tremendous benefits to attending a summer camp, and that a scholarship system would allow even more children to receive this opportunity, especially those who are economically disadvantaged.

Outside of academic studies, there are many personal stories related to the benefits of summer camp. One example is the tale of Camp Kern. Camp Kern was founded in 1910 when Carl B. Kern and Chris Kunz took 28 youth from their YMCA on a camping trip to Fort Ancient, Ohio. Over 100 years later, Camp Kern is thriving, averaging over 30,000 guests per year (The Dayton Foundation, 2018). Many campers had a positive experience while at Camp Kern and carried that experience with them through life. One such camper was Dr. Stuart Weinberg. Dr. Weinberg often spoke glowingly of his time at Camp Kern, and even met his wife Anne while at camp. About Camp Kern, he said, "I had the pleasure of being a camper, staff member, board member and volunteer for Camp Kern. My experiences working with children played a key role in my decision to become a pediatrician. The positive impact that one person can have on youth cannot be underestimated. C.B. considered summer camp an especially valuable environment to

provide guidance and leadership to youth” (The Dayton Foundation, 2018). Dr. Weinberg gave back to Camp Kern by starting the Carl B. Kern Fund in 1987. To date, the fund has raised over \$160,000 for the camp. The camp uses the money for everything from improving operations to providing scholarship opportunities for local youth. The fund relies on donations from alumni of Camp Kern, which is a great opportunity for former campers to give back to an organization that had a positive impact and influence on their lives.

Camp Scholarship Obstacles

While the benefit of summer camps and their potential scholarships is easily identified, creating and sustaining a summer camp scholarship program is not a high priority for many professional staff within campus recreation. For some, running the summer camp is just a positional tack-on to their full-time job; they need something to do in the summer when their department is down, so they run the summer camp. Since the summer camps are, in essence, a side job, there is no need or desire to create a fund. Others avoid it because it is outside their area of expertise. They might have some interest in creating a scholarship program, but this falls outside of their higher-education business degree; they are not sure what to do, so they do not get involved. Others might have a strong interest in creating a scholarship program, but they are unsure of the proper fundraising techniques to use. There is no easy way to fundraise, so unless a staff member has done it before, the task seems daunting and not worth the extra effort.

While these reasons are understandable, they should not be the sole factors in determining whether to create a scholarship fund. Many professional staff may view creating a scholarship fund as something they must do on their own, but they do have the option to seek help. Instead of turning toward other full-time staff members, they could turn toward the student workers for help. It would be a way for them to not only develop some transferable skills, but also a way for them to give back to campus recreation, regardless of if they have graduated or are still in school. It creates an avenue for them to reinvest and give back to their university.

Student Help

Many people might be opposed to the idea of asking students for help because of the generation to which they belong: such as Millennials. Millennials are often seen as lazy, self-entitled individuals who seek instant gratification and only seek to help themselves, not others. However, this impression is untrue. In reality, Millennials have been shown to be rather generous. According to the Blackbaud fundraising firm, 84% of Millennials give back toward charitable organizations, which is greater than both Baby Boomers (72%) and Generation X (59%) (Notte, 2018). While the majority of Millennials are willing to, and do, give back to charitable organizations, only 54% are able to give back through their workplace (Notte, 2018). Still, many are willing to take part in fundraising events associated with work. According to the Deloitte accounting firm, 23% of Millennials like to fundraise through sponsorships or hosting special events (Notte, 2018). Along with that, finding ways to involve employees, regardless of age, in philanthropy can increase their commitment and attitude toward the company (Raub, 2017). This information demonstrates that Millennials and youth are willing to assist in

charitable endeavors, despite the stereotypes put forth about them. Therefore, while many professional staff members would not consider turning to their student employees for help, research shows that some of them are more than willing to help in charitable endeavors, such as starting a camp scholarship fund.

Implementation

In order to get students to give back, there needs to be a way for them to do so. For campus recreation and summer camp scholarships, the following is an example of how to implement training and programs for them to give back. The idea of giving back should be introduced in training. During training, professional staff members can introduce the idea of giving back to campus recreation through the summer camp scholarship program they started. Training does not have to be that intensive, but it should highlight how this department works toward building a legacy. As for the scholarship program, it could be done through a scholarship fund, a “Camper of the Year,” or some combination of both. Each year, the workers of the recreation department come together and raise enough money through direct donations, fundraisers, or other ideas for their chosen camper to attend camp that summer. The key is both students and professional staff are involved so the students do not have to do on their own. This process is repeated year after year with a new camper each time, or, if enough people participate, two to three “Campers of the Year.” This is a great way to get current students to give back, while demonstrating its importance within the department.

For students who have graduated, universities should take a slightly different approach. For them, set up a scholarship fund where they can donate. This acts in a similar manner

as the “Camper of the Year,” but purely alumni would fund it. Here, alumni donate money to allow even more children to attend summer camp. Ideally, the fund is built until it reaches perpetuity, allowing the fund to go on indefinitely. It would allow even more economically disadvantaged children to reap the benefits of summer camp while simultaneously allowing alumni to give back to a program or group that was important to them. While this example is specifically tied to campus recreation, the premise can be applied across a multitude of departments; just pick the avenue that works best and plant the seed of giving back in training.

Conclusion

Engagement and options of how to donate are essential if alumni are to give back to their universities. Many alumni who were engaged throughout school have a positive disposition toward their university and want to give back, but they are unsure how.

About 57% of alumni feel it is unclear how to support their former departments, and 15% think it is difficult to contribute (Crisp & Seedsman, 2016). Alumni want to be able to understand the impact of their gift but being unclear on where their gift goes or how to support the departments of their choice compounds the issue. If alumni giving is to be increased, they have to be given the option to contribute to the specific causes that they find important and introduced at the start of their collegiate career (Santovec, 2005).

Alumni want to be able to give to the areas that have impacted them over the course of their college career, not necessarily the college as a whole or departments with whom they had no interaction. In campus recreation, there are former student workers who would give back to a department that helped them grow professionally, but they do not know how. Teaching employees about the summer camp scholarship fund in their

training, and how they could help it grow would increase student interest. As for those who have already graduated, they could see this as an opportunity to give back to campus recreation while helping another child enjoy recreation as they did.

In the end, the creation of a scholarship fund for recreational summer camps does not matter. What matters is giving alumni the opportunity to give back to the departments that mattered to them and showing them the importance of giving back. Whether it is campus recreation, student development, the library, housing and residence life, or any other departments, alumni have to be given the freedom to choose. If alumni are free to choose, if an avenue is created for them to give back-such as a summer camp scholarship fund, and if they are introduced to the idea of giving back through programming, then they will give back. The message will not stick with everyone, but it will stick with some, and that is the goal. It will allow alumni to reinvest in the programs and organizations that helped them grow personally and professionally, and it will allow them to give back and leave their own legacy.

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