

## SOAR Research Proposal, Summer 2016

*The Role of Physical Activity in the Overall College Experience: How students and athletic directors perceive the challenges and benefits of staying physically active while in college.*

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Virginia Adams O'Connell, Associate Professor of Sociology

**Student:** Jordan Sweeney

**Dates:** 10 weeks, May 31st - August 9th

### Project Description

Looking to address the obesity epidemic in the United States, and seeking to understand the detrimental impact of the abandonment of physical education programs in elementary and high schools across the US (Baker 2012), researchers from a variety of social and medical sciences have renewed efforts over the last decade to measure the impact of physical activity on overall health measures (mental and physical), as well as on cognitive functioning. The majority of studies have found positive associations between physical activity, physical health and academic performance (Esteban-Cornejo et al 2015, Erickson, Hillman and Kramer 2015, Mullender-Wijnsma et al 2016), suggesting that a re-establishment of physical education (PE) requirements is in order. Studies have also found links between physical activity and mental health outcomes. Individuals (both children and adults) who participate in regular physical activity report better mental health, less depression and less anxiety (Hill, Dengel and Lubans 2015, Strine et al 2008).

The bulk of this research has been conducted in elementary and high school settings. Far fewer studies have looked at these potential links at college and university settings. At the college level, the majority of studies have investigated the link between team-level athletic participation and academic performance and have systematically found a negative correlation. Student athletes, especially at Division I schools, often report lower overall GPAs compared to their non-athlete peers (Rampell 2015). This negative correlation is most often attributed to the overwhelming time commitment that college athletes must devote to their sport. There are literally not enough hours in a day to devote to both athletic/physical and academic pursuits. But does this mean that there is no place and health-promoting function for "PE" requirements or programs in college? While it has been standard to require physical education programs for elementary and high school students, this was not true at the college level, and colleges have been dropping PE requirements citing already full schedules and the idea that requiring PE infantilizes the student body. College students are adults that can make the autonomous decision to exercise.

This research study aims to understand how students and a subset of administrators at colleges and universities in the LVAIC school system perceive the role of physical activity/exercise in the overall college experience. While we hypothesize that on average, student athletes will report "getting enough exercise," how do non-athletes assess their opportunities for physical activity and how do the athletic directors view their roles in providing and promoting these opportunities? How many of the non-athletes fall short of the recommended weekly amount of exercise and how might this impact their academic performance, their sense of well-being, and their overall assessment of their college experience?

We propose to invite a number of LVAIC schools, as well as Northampton Community College (NACC), to participate in this study. Inviting a variety of institutions will allow for comparisons between the different sizes and types of colleges/universities. Student athletes and non-athletes will complete an online survey to collect information on their normal routines, including how often they exercise. We will also gather information on their sense of well-being and their self-assessment of how academically successful they have been to date. We will also seek structured interviews with the athletic directors and their staff to collect their perspectives about the challenges associated with taking care of the needs of both student athletes and non-athletes. We hypothesize that some of the challenges may be institution-specific, but we suspect there will be quite a substantial amount of overlap in the identified challenges. The data that we collect and the report that we produce will hopefully promote a dialogue between these institutions and result in new ideas for supporting student well-being in the LVAIC system.

As part of his requirements for the SOC 246: Basic Research Methods, Jordan has already conducted background research on this topic and has compiled a literature review, a conceptual model of variables involved in the study, drafted consent letters, and drafted a survey instrument. He has also compiled a list of staff members to contact at the institutions we will include in the study. In addition, he has contacted Moravian College's Athletic Director George Bright for help with reaching out to administrators from other institutions. Please see the Appendix for this information.

### **Faculty's and Student's Roles and Responsibilities**

- Dr. Adams O'Connell and Jordan Sweeney understand that they will have to obtain HSIRB approval from Moravian College, NACC, and from the LVAIC schools that agree to participate before conducting the study.
- Data collection: Jordan will be responsible for obtaining the student email list from the various LVAIC institutions and NACC. He will also be conducting the interviews with the athletic directors and their staff from the selected institutions. Dr. Adams O'Connell will edit the survey before distribution and help Jordan formulate questions to cover during his interviews.
- Data analysis: Jordan will be responsible for reviewing all of the survey data and inputting it into SPSS. Under Dr. Adams O'Connell's instruction, Jordan will run the appropriate statistical tests to test their various hypotheses.
- Data presentation: Jordan will create a presentation based upon their analysis of the data to be submitted to the 2017 Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting. Dr. Adams O'Connell and Jordan Sweeney also plan to publish the study as an article.

### **Proposed Timetable**

#### **Pre-research**

- Working to obtain proper approval to conduct the research at the other institutions.
- Finalization of the survey instrument and survey protocol.
- Administrators from the institutions will be contacted to schedule interviews.
- Edit the survey instrument and work on interview skills
- Edit the consent forms for the survey and interviews

Weeks 1-2:

- Build on the literature review and conduct additional research on the correlation between physical activity and assessment of academic success in college students
- The survey link will be sent out to students at the selected institutions
- Conduct some of the interviews with administrative staff from the selected institutions

Weeks 3-6:

- Conduct the rest of the interviews with administrative staff
- Create a coding system for the survey data
- Begin to examine and analyze data from the completed surveys: Input this data into SPSS
- Analyze the administrators' interview responses
- The online survey will close before the end of this period

Weeks 7-10:

- Finish analyzing the data collected from the surveys
- Start using the analysis to create the report
- Use the analysis presented in the report to create a presentation of the information: create a poster for the presentation
- Submit the presentation to the 2017 Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting

### **Benefits to the Student**

The SOAR project will allow Jordan to immerse himself in field research in order to test and examine a sociological phenomena that has peaked his interest. Through conducting this experiment and formulating his own analyses, Jordan will have the opportunity to strengthen his understanding of sociological methods. Being that Jordan has already done some work on this study, he has become familiar with some requirements for conducting sociological research. He wishes to expand his knowledge by actually executing the procedures to complete the study. Through this Jordan will gain a respect for the diligence it takes to conduct a research study. Jordan will also gain an advanced knowledge on how to use SPSS to analyze a large data set. By formulating a report to summarize his study and analyses, he will be able to advance his sociological writing skills. Lastly, through creating a presentation based on his research and submitting that presentation to the 2017 Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting, Jordan will have the opportunity to showcase his findings while gaining experience in publicly speaking about his work to a community of professional sociologists.

References:

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/11/education/even-as-schools-battle-obesity-physical-education-is-sidelined.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/11/education/even-as-schools-battle-obesity-physical-education-is-sidelined.html?_r=0)

Erickson, Kirk I., Charles H. Hillman, and Arthur F. Kramer, "Physical Activity, brain and cognition," *Current Opinion in Behavioral Science*, Vol 4, August 2015: 27-32

Esteban-Cornejo, Irene, Carlos Tejero-Gonzales, James F. Sallis, Oscar L. Veiga, "Physical activity and cognition in adolescents: A systematic review", *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, Vol 18, Issue 5, September 2015: 534-539

Mullender-Wijnsma, Marijke J., Esther Hartman, Johannes W. de Greeff, Simone Doolaard, Roel J. Bosker, Chris Visscher, "Physically Active Math and Language Lessons Improve Academic Achievement: A Cluster Randomized Controlled Trial," *Pediatrics*, March 2016, Volume 137, Issue 3

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## Student Statement of Purpose

*The Role of Physical Activity in the Overall College Experience: How students and athletic directors perceive the challenges and benefits of staying physically active while in college.*

**Student:** Jordan Sweeney **Major:** Sociology and Pre-Athletic Training **Graduation Year:** 2017

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Virginia Adams O'Connell

**Is on campus housing requested?** Yes

I am interested in participating in the SOAR program for the numerous benefits it has towards my educational experiences. The project that Dr. Adams O'Connell and I are proposing allows me to examine the world through a sociological lens, while connecting both of my majors. This project allows me to view the social components that come with being a student athlete in college, while comparing their experiences with those of regular students. This is beneficial to my pursuits of entering into the athletic training graduate program at Moravian College because it will allow me to understand how athletics affect student life at the participating institutions, as well as the effect athletics and physical health have on institutional processes of colleges and universities.

Not only does this study allow me to take a different view on the career path I will follow, but it also allows me to collaborate with my advisor, Dr. Adams O'Connell, on an intellectual project. Given the opportunity to participate in the SOAR program with Dr. Adams O'Connell would be a great privilege, especially considering her experience in sociological research. I know there is an extensive amount she can teach me about conducting research outside of the research methods courses, and I would like to continue my learning beyond the classroom. Studying a topic that I am particularly interested through the SOAR program will allow me to expand on the knowledge that I have acquired during the last two and a half years, with a hands-on learning experience that will engage what I have learned in courses.

Through writing about my work in preparation to create a presentation of my analysis, my sociological writing skills will be improved. Also while I create a presentation about the study with Dr. Adams O'Connell, I will understand how to present a sociology study. By submitting the presentation to the 2017 Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting, I will have the opportunity to present the research to a large audience of peers and professionals. I will also be able to expand my knowledge on designing a research study, editing survey instruments, and analyzing survey data. I will gain an advanced knowledge in submitting and analyzing data with SPSS as well as some basic functions of Microsoft Excel. Each of these skills is useful to me, and students in general, when applying to the athletic training graduate program and any future jobs.

## Expense Proposal

*The Role of Physical Activity in the Overall College Experience: How students and athletic directors perceive the challenges and benefits of staying physically active while in college.*

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Virginia Adams O'Connell

**Student:** Jordan Sweeney

I am proposing that the additional \$500 will be essential for executing this research study. The first major expense that will need to be covered is 150 miles of travel to the participating schools to conduct essential processes for the study, such as interviews and paperwork reviews. The athletic department staff members that I will interview will be invited to have lunch with me, as a way to facilitate the interviews. I am proposing that part of this money would be allocated to cover the meals of those staff members I interview. It is possible that I will need to conduct more than one interview with a staff member from certain institutions (each interview being with a different person), in order to understand the perceptions of that institution. The meals are estimated at \$25 per person interviewed, and I am anticipating to interview 8 people; therefore, I will allocate \$200 for staff member lunches. The last expense that I will need to cover is raffle prizes for students that participate in the survey. The raffle, which will be drawn at the close of the survey, will be used as the incentive for students to participate in the study. I plan to purchase gift cards to raffle off to the student participants.

# Appendix

## Literature Rearview

According to various sources, physical activity and athletics (intramural or varsity) have become a major hobby for students on college and university campuses (Barfield & Hutchinson, 2012; Bhochhibhoya, 2014; Emerson et al., 2009; Mull & Tietjen-Smith, 2014; Racette et al., 2008; Bhochhibhoya et al., 2014; Năsui & Popescu, 2014). Moreover, with the rapid gain in popularity and commercialization of large Division I National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) athletics, sociologists along with educators have begun to ponder the effects physical activity and/or athletic participation, in conjunction with students' majors and social activities, have on academic performance in college students. Previously a majority of these studies have only focused on observing this study in children and teenagers. Most of the studies, such as one done by Videon (2002), seem to put focus on high school students who participate in interscholastic athletics. Studies, which examined college and university students in other countries, have also been conducted, but existing research regarding this topic for college students must be broadened so that institutions of higher education can see why or why not they should implement physical education requirements like those in all elementary, middle, and high schools in the United States. Furthering the research previously conducted can potentially benefit the academic reputations of higher education institutions by informing them of how athletics and physical activity are affecting the students in attendance.

In 2008 the NCAA reported to have 444 institutions as members of the Division III category with a majority (80%) of them colleges. The average number of students at these small schools (2,250) was drastically lower than the number of students at Division I schools. At Division III colleges and universities the average proportion of student athletes was only about 1/5. This also leads to an inability to have as much diversity as the larger institutions. (Emerson et al. 2009)

In studies examining physical activity in students at colleges and universities it was found that the physically active students in the experimental groups have had better academic performance (usually measured by GPA) than the less physically active control groups with varying specific results calculated by the researcher(s) (Barfield & Hutchinson, 2012; Bhochhibhoya, 2014; Emerson et al., 2009; Mull & Tietjen-Smith, 2014; Racette et al., 2008; Bhochhibhoya et al., 2014; Năsui & Popescu, 2014). It has also been seen that over time students tended to gain weight as they progressed through their college careers (Racette et al., 2008), but there was too much variability to say that this was directly due to physical activity habits. This data will not be collected here because of the variability and an expectation that this data would more than likely not hold much validity in for this research. Studies have also shown that larger portions of males participate in physical activity or intercollegiate athletics than do females. (Barfield & Hutchinson, 2012; Bhochhibhoya, 2014; Emerson et al., 2009; Mull & Tietjen-Smith, 2014; Racette et al., 2008; Bhochhibhoya et al., 2014; Năsui & Popescu, 2014). No hypotheses have been made about gender for this study because other factors, such as gender enrollment percentages, might have an affect on the number of males and females in college who are physically active. Furthermore, it is expected that the results of this research will reflect the same outcomes for academics with more variability due to the study being conducted at institutions of different size, athletic competition level, and title (e.g. college or university). Despite the variability, this study will be conducted in one area, unlike the research done by

Emerson et al. (2009), Umbach et al. (2006), Preston (2013), and Gayles and Hu (2009), making it hard to apply the theory that higher education institutions nationwide should implement physical education requirements.

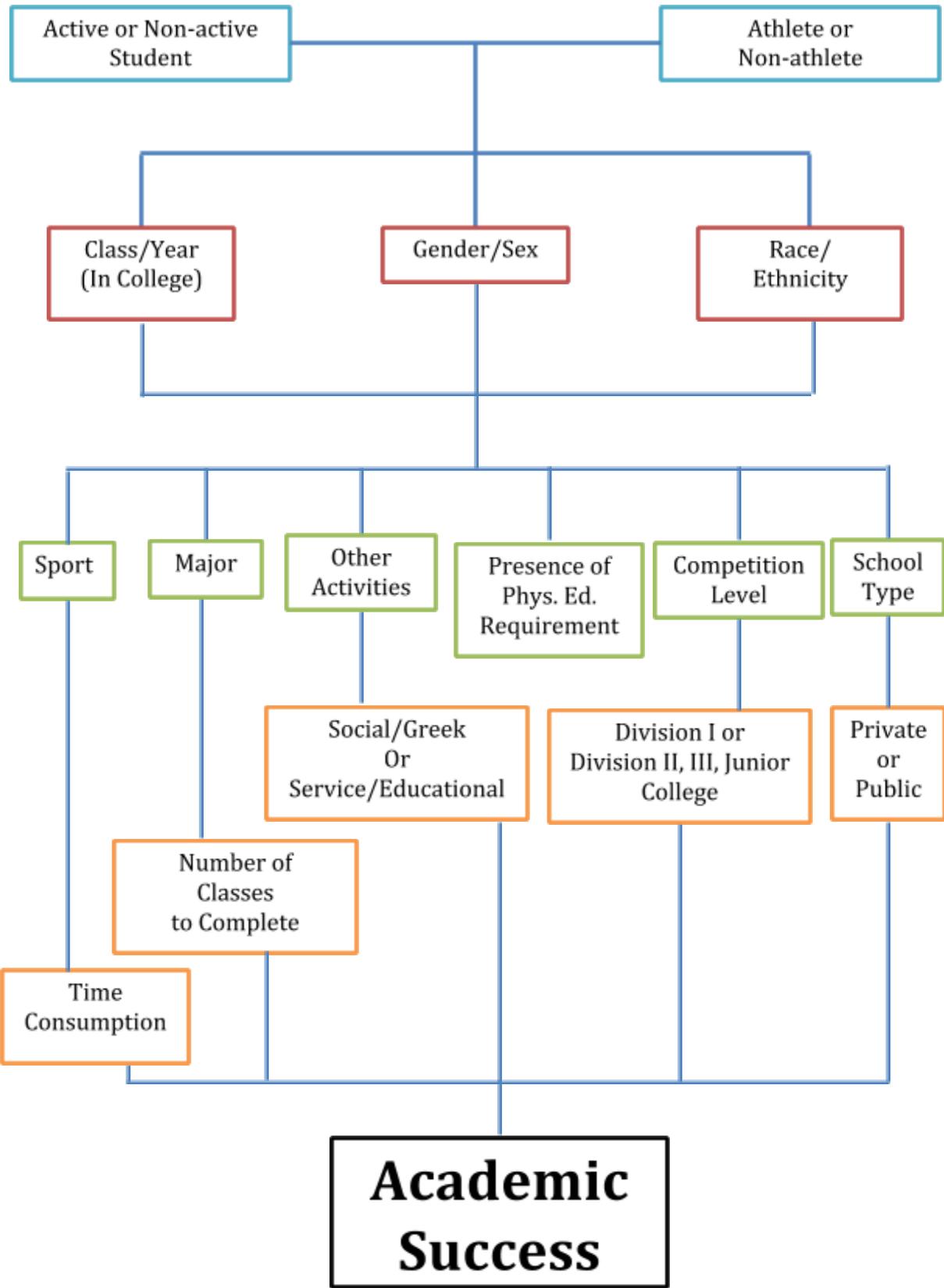
Sociologists have also found that student athletes at Division I institutions spend too much time on athletics having detrimental effects on academic the athlete's academic performances (Gayles & Hu, 2009). A social limits interaction with other students outside of their teams has also been attributed to spending too much time on athletics (Umbach et al. 2006). Because college students need to focus a great deal of time on academic preparation outside of the classroom this is very controversial. This has also been found to be attributed to the commercialization of large Division I institution's athletics increasing stress on these athletes (Preston, 2013). This research will attempt to refute these findings to identify the ability of students to find a balance between athletics and academics.

All of these sources will be used in order to compare them with what is found through this study. The sources are all relevant because they give grounds for comparing the results of this study with those from the sources to find any possible discrepancies between the two. It is expected and hoped that the trends in this study will follow those previously found for the positive correlations between athletics or physical activity and college students' academic success (Barfield & Hutchinson, 2012; Bhoohibhoya, 2014; Emerson et al., 2009; Mull & Tietjen-Smith, 2014; Racette et al., 2008; Bhoohibhoya et al., 2014; Năsui & Popescu, 2014). The data would then be analyzed to make the argument of whether or not colleges and universities should have or implement physical education course requirements. Along with comparing data these sources are being used to find new variables to examine throughout this research study. For example, in 2009 Emerson, Brooks, and McKenzie studied the college athletics and student achievement at small (NCAA Division III) colleges, but this study will be examining colleges of different sizes and different divisions of athletic competition. Also the type of school being studied (e.g. public or private) will be reported because this variable was not examined in any of the studies found. Additionally, the research for this project will examine how a student's year in college might be a factor in this study to expand upon the findings of Barfield and Hutchinson (2012). Likewise, the sports the athletes are playing will be broken down by time consumption as a measure of difficulty to make connections to the information presented by Gayles and Hu (2009), who studied how time consuming sports were on average to discuss what that meant for academics and social involvement.

## Conceptual Model

The conceptual model begins with active vs. inactive college students which encompasses the category of athletes and non-athletes because they are the broadest variable categories being studied to understand how physical activity affects academic performance in college and university students. Barfield and Hutchinson (2012), Videon (2002), and Emerson et al. (2009), included information about students year in college, gender of the students, and race/ethnicity of students respectively in their studies to help explain the relationship between physical activity and academic success in college students.

The next variables listed in the conceptual framework for this research are mid levels. All of the variables, with the exception of one, have been broken down into sub categories that will be modified in order to be dichotomous (2 options). The main mid level variable being studied is the presence of, or lack thereof, a physical education requirement at higher education institutions involved in the research project. This variable has not been broken down as it is already dichotomous. The other mid levels have been included because they have been examined in previously performed professional studies and may have an affect on the research being done in this study. Gayles and Hu (2009), recorded the sports the athletes involved in their study participated in. This is sub categorized by time consumption in this study. Umbach et al. (2006), discuss the majors athletes involved in the study were seeking to complete. The number of class credits needed to complete the major will measure the difficulty of the majors of the athletes involved in the study. I did not find studies that investigated the other activities intercollegiate athletes, however this variable will be studied to understand whether or not this also affects the academics of students involved in the study. That being said this variable has been broken down into Greek/Social organizations and Service/Educational organizations. The competition level of the athletes has been broken into Division I athletes with athletes at all other competition levels (Division II, III, & Junior College) are an individual subcategory. Competition level has been examined in studies done by Umbach (2009), Emerson et al. (2009), Pascarella and Bohr (1995), Preston (2013), and Gayles and Hu (2009). An examinations of the type of higher education institutional was included in the framework because, from the sources viewed, the specific categorization of this variable (Private or Public) was not seen. The mid level variables, as well as the true variables, may or may not be included in any and all of the studies cited, but those studies cited seem to have the variables most present throughout them. Specific connections and correlations between the different true variables and mid levels (e.g. Gender/Sex affect on Sport type) will also be examined but are not included because they are hard to determine without having actually performed the study. All of the variables mentioned will be studied to understand the affect they may or may not have on the academic success (the independent variable).



## References:

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Videon, Tami M. 2002. "Who Plays and Who Benefits: Gender, Interscholastic Athletics, and Academic Outcomes." *Sociological Perspectives* 45(4): 415-444

## **Draft: Informed Consent Letters**

### The Correlation Between Physical Activity and Academic Success in College Students

Attention survey participants:

My name is Jordan Sweeney and I am conducting a study as a student in the Moravian College Sociology Department. Using this survey I am collecting data about college and university students to study the correlation between physical activity and students' academic successes. This 30-minute survey will be the only survey participants are asked to complete. No further contact with participants will be made upon completion of this survey. There will be no direct contact between any participants and myself as this survey is to be completed online and every effort has been made to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

I understand that the participants may feel uncomfortable providing any information about their academics and physical activity habits. That being said, I can assure that at no point will any personal identifiers be collected with this survey. This is also insured because, as directed by myself, the survey generator used will not collect the IP addresses of the computers used by participants.

Upon completion of the survey you will be asked to create a number to be used to enter a raffle for various prizes after the completion of the study. The raffle winners will be pulled by someone other than myself who is not at all in contact with the information collected by the survey so that participants remain anonymous to me. You will be able cease participation in this survey at any time you feel uncomfortable.

In the event you experience any untoward effects as a result of participating, I have provided the contact information for the Moravian College Campus Safety Department, Health Center, and Counseling Center. If you attend an institution that is not Moravian College, I encourage you to seek assistance from the comparable resources at your institution.

The Health Center  
250 W. Laurel Street  
Bethlehem, PA 18018  
(610) 861-1567

The Counseling Center  
1301 Main Street  
Bethlehem, PA 18018  
(610) 861-1510

The Office of Campus Safety and Police  
119 W. Greenwich Street  
Bethlehem, PA 18018  
(610) 861-1421  
(610) 861-1465

Thank you for your participation and best regards,

Jordan Sweeney

## The Correlation Between Physical Activity and Academic Success in College Students

Dear (insert institution name) Athletic Department staff,  
Or Dear (insert institution athletic department staff member's name),

My name is Jordan Sweeney and I am conducting a study as a student in the Moravian college Sociology Department. During this interview I will be asking questions about the nature of the students attending your institution in regards to athletics and physical activity, as well as academics. The interview is estimated to last for one hour, although I may contact you at a later time for further clarification of your responses. In order to meet and have our discussion, I am inviting you to have lunch, which I will pay for, with me.

The questions asked might be uncomfortable to answer, as you will be asked about where your institution and students lack with respect to physical activity and athletics. I can assure you that every effort has been made to keep the questions being asked from offending you or anyone else at your institution. The questions being asked are designed to create a conversation to understand the policies of your institution so that I can analyze them, along with student survey data to determine what might benefit the institutions involved.

Any notes from this interview will be shredded upon transcription to a digital document. Any devices containing digital notes will be put under passwords and recording devices used during the interview will be stored and locked in a lock box under my possession for up to a year after the experiment is completed. You may neglect to answer any question I ask at any time or end the interview at any time.

If you experience any untoward harm throughout the duration of this interview, I have provided the contact information for the Moravian College Campus Safety Department, Health Center, and Counseling Center. This also applies if you feel that I have threatened your institution of employment. If an institution other than Moravian College employs you, I encourage you to seek assistance from comparable resources if you feel that you have been harmed during this interview.

The Health Center  
250 W. Laurel Street  
Bethlehem, PA 18018  
(610) 861-1567

The Counseling Center  
1301 Main Street  
Bethlehem, PA 18018  
(610) 861-1510

The Office of Campus Safety and Police  
119 W. Greenwich Street  
Bethlehem, PA 18018  
(610) 861-1421  
(610) 861-1465

Thank you for your participation and best regards,

Jordan Sweeney



6. How often do you do the following? :

	Never	Rarely	Every once in a while	Sometimes	Almost always
In addition to practicing, I workout on my own.	1	2	3	4	5

7. To what degree do you agree with the following statements (circle the number)? :

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel physically good after I workout.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel mentally good after I workout.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I like working out.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My college should have a physical education course requirement.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I want my college to implement a physical education course requirement.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It would be beneficial to students if my college had physical education courses	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8. Do you participate in intramural sports?

- No
- Yes

9. Are you a member of a fraternity/sorority?

- No
- Yes

10. Are you a member of an honor society?

- No
- Yes

11. Do you participate in any clubs on your campus?

- No
- Yes

12. How many total clubs and organizations are you involved in: \_\_\_\_\_

13. Do you do any community service (volunteer, raise money, make donations, etc.) on or around your campus?

- No
- Yes

14. How old were you on your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_

15. Please fill in the circle next to the sex/gender with which you best identify?

- Female
- Male
- Category not listed: \_\_\_\_\_

16. Please fill in the circle that corresponds with your race/ethnicity? (Indicate all that apply)

- African American
- Asian
- Caucasian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Category not listed: \_\_\_\_\_

17. What is/are your major(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

18. What year did you or do you expect to graduate from your college/university? \_\_\_\_\_

## School List and Staff Contact Information

### Moravian College

- A.D. - George Bright
  - Email: [brightg@moravian.edu](mailto:brightg@moravian.edu)
- Provost - Cynthia Kosso, Ph.D.
  - Email: [kossoc@moravian.edu](mailto:kossoc@moravian.edu)

### Cedar Crest College (may not be good without an all male college/university)

- All women's institution
- A.D. - Dr. Allen G. Snook Jr.
  - Phone: 610-606-4666 x4401
  - Email: [agsnook@cedarcrest.edu](mailto:agsnook@cedarcrest.edu)
- Provost - Elizabeth M. Meade, Ph.D.
  - Email: [emeade@cedarcrest.edu](mailto:emeade@cedarcrest.edu)

### Lafayette College

- A.D. - Bruce McCutcheon
  - Email: [mccutchb@lafayette.edu](mailto:mccutchb@lafayette.edu)
- Provost - S. Abu Turab Rizvi
  - Email: [rizivia@lafayette.edu](mailto:rizivia@lafayette.edu)
  - Phone: (610) 330-5066

### Northampton Community College

- Has PE department/professors
- A.D. - Troy Tucker
  - Email: [tlucker@northampton.edu](mailto:tlucker@northampton.edu)
  - Phone: 610-332-8692
- Dr. Carolyn M. Bortz, Vice President, Academic Affairs
  - Email: [CBortz@northampton.edu](mailto:CBortz@northampton.edu)
  - Phone: 610.861.5434

### DeSales University

- A.D. - Scott Coval
  - Email: [Scott.Coval@desales.edu](mailto:Scott.Coval@desales.edu)
  - Phone ext.: 1351
- Provost - Dr. Karen Walton
  - Email: [acadaff@desales.edu](mailto:acadaff@desales.edu)

### Muhlenberg College

- A.D. - Cory Goff
  - Email: [cgoff@muhlenberg.edu](mailto:cgoff@muhlenberg.edu)
  - Phone: 484-664-3380
- Provost - John Ramsay
  - Phone: (484) 664-3134