

**Strengthening Community: The Role of Campus Recreation on Students' Sense of Mattering in
Community Colleges**

A Capstone Project

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Abstract

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The qualitative case study examined how community college students' involvement in campus recreation impacted their feelings of mattering. Using Schlossberg's Mattering (1989) theoretical framework, this study used a convenience sample to interview 8 student participants and 3 college administrators at a medium-sized community college in Virginia. Each interview was coded using the five elements of Schlossberg's Mattering (1989), which consists of importance, attention, appreciation, dependence, and ego-extension. Findings indicated that students who were involved in campus recreation felt a strong sense of mattering through connections with campus recreation staff, along with the campus recreation environment established at the studied institution. Given the scarcity of research surrounding community college students' sense of mattering, paired with this study being limited to one institution, there is a need for additional research.

Keywords: Community college, mattering, campus recreation, mattering, connections

Dedication

“The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short, but in setting our aim too low and achieving the mark.”

-Michelangelo

This capstone is dedicated to my future children. May education serve as your navigation tool for a lifetime of opportunities. Allow the many lessons you learn to assist in making a meaningful and positive impact on those around you. It is my hope that you lead with kindness, consideration, and purpose. Always believe in your abilities to be great and remember the importance of doing the hard things!

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background of the Study

Over the years, colleges and universities have placed a large emphasis on campus resources, including programs and state-of-the-art facilities. Specifically, campus recreation has increasingly taken center stage for the role it plays on college and university campuses (Henchy, 2011; Dalgarn, 2001). Campus recreation facilities serve as a physical space where students, faculty, staff, alumni, and in some cases, community members, can come together to practice leading healthy lives. Some of the offerings provided by campus recreation facilities include, but are not limited to, intramural and recreational sports, club sports, cardio equipment, basketball courts, pickleball courts, indoor tracks, aquatics centers, strength-training equipment, and group classes.

While living and sustaining a healthy lifestyle is at the core of campus recreation facilities' mission (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2023), the benefits that they offer are richer than just health. Researchers have found that campus recreation programming and facilities have a positive impact on the college student experience. In a 2014 report conducted by the National Intramural Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA), researchers identified the benefits of campus recreation for students from 38 institutions of higher education. Their report found that recruitment, retention, wellness outcomes, learning outcomes, and developing community were among the main benefits of students participating in campus recreation (Forrester, 2014).

The history of intramural and recreational sports and programs goes back 120 years. In the mid-1900s institutions of higher education began to develop intramural and recreational sports programs as part of their physical education curriculum (NIRSA, 2016). Among the leaders of higher education institutions, Dr. William Wasson set out to conduct a comparative analysis of intramural programs across

several Historically Black institutions, leading to the formation of the National Intramural Association (NIA) in 1950 (NIRSA, 2016).

Unlike other areas of higher education history, the formation of the NIA was unique in that it only consisted of Historically Black Colleges. Additionally, it was not until after 1971 that other demographics, such as women, were extended membership into the association (NIRSA, 2016). Additionally, the organization experienced a shift in focus in 1975, when they began incorporating the ideas and concepts of recreational sports into their identity, known today as the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA, 2016).

Through the creation of these programs, many higher education professionals at colleges and universities have begun identifying the benefits that these programs have, such as recruitment, retention, wellness outcomes, learning outcomes, and community building. In the following section, I will provide insight from a study conducted by the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association that assists in understanding why this research topic is important to the field, specifically in bridging an existing gap that exists in research around the community college population.

Recruitment

As individuals begin their exploration for a college or university to attend, the physical presence of state-of-the-art facilities and grounds play a role in attracting them to an institution. Forrester (2014) found that 68% of students selected their respective institution to attend, in part, due to the institution's campus recreation facilities. The same research report found that 62% of students' decisions to attend their selected institution rooted from campus recreation facilities providing access to programs and initiatives that promote healthy lifestyles and habits.

Retention

Years of research have shown that student success, including retention, increases with their involvement in extracurriculars on campus (King, et al., 2021). In the age of high-tech and multifunctional facilities, campus recreation facilities have begun to play a vital role in student retention for students who participate in programs or routinely use facilities. In addition to Forrester's (2014)

findings showing that campus recreation facilities and programs impacted students' decisions to attend, it found that 74% of students were influenced by their facilities and 67% were influenced by the programs offered at their campus recreation facility, leading to their decisions to stay enrolled at their college or university. Not only does retaining benefit institutions, but it has significant benefits to individual students as well. Students who had some level of postsecondary education had higher employment rates and earnings, with the state of Virginia having median annual earnings around \$70k (Ma & Pender, 2023). Students who stay at their institution also have a higher likelihood of reaping the health and wellness benefits.

Wellness Outcomes

Research shows that students who acquire higher levels of education are more likely to participate in weekly exercise, therefore contributing to a healthier lifestyle (Ma & Pender, 2023). Forrester (2014) identified that campus recreation facilities and programs have a positive impact on students' quality of life. Nationally 94% of students who participated in campus recreation programs shared that leading a healthy lifestyle was important to them, with 98% of students expressing an importance to maintain a healthy lifestyle after college. Additionally, student participation leads to other wellness benefits, such as stress management, confidence, and concentration (Forrester, 2014; Mulrooney & Kelly, 2020; Ellis, et al., 2002). These benefits assist colleges and universities in helping develop the whole student.

Learning Outcomes

Aside from the physical benefits that come with student participation in campus recreation facilities and programs, Forrester (2014) found that participation had longstanding life benefits, such as time management and communication skills. Students who participated in their campus facilities or programs indicated that they felt an increase in their academic performance and sense of mattering, among other things. Much like retention, student academic performance and mattering are vital to both the student and institution, given that they both lead to increased graduation rates (King, et al., 2021; Scott, et al., 2008). For students, graduating can contribute to higher lifetime earnings and better

employment opportunities (Ma & Pender, 2023). Institutions benefit from increased student academic performances through college rankings, funding, and reputation (Morse & Brooks, 2023).

Student participation in campus recreation facilities and programs have many benefits for both students and institutions at-large. While research continues to identify the many benefits that such facilities and programs bring to the table for all constituents, a gap in understanding this at all levels of higher education still exists.

Statement of the Problem

Campus recreation has become an overwhelmingly important aspect of college and university campuses throughout the nation. Much of the research that has been conducted around the impact that campus recreation involvement has on college students has been conducted at four-year institutions. With research focusing primarily on four-year, public institutions, there is a lack of representation of the impact that campus recreation has on students at two-year/community colleges. Specifically, there is little-to-no research that exists on how campus recreation involvement contributes to student sense of mattering at community colleges. Therefore, it is vital that similar research around the benefits and impact of campus recreation involvement be conducted at community colleges. With approximately 36% of the nation's undergraduate students attending two-year institutions (Community College Research Center, 2023), it is more important than ever that the research places a focus on a growing and diverse population of today's college students.

With historically lower graduation rates than their four-year peers, community colleges continue to face pressure to increase their efforts to close the completion gap (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Contributing to the lack of completion amongst community college students is the rate at which community college students retain. Research has shown that community college students retain at much lower rates, with part of the issue being students who stop-out (Community College Research Center, 2023; Windham, et al., 2014). Community college students who stop-out are negatively impacted by this outcome, due to many of them not returning after long periods of time, if ever. Specifically,

community college students who stop-out at any point in their educational journey have lower earnings after college (Maggio & Attewell, 2020).

Much like the impact on individual students, community colleges face large financial implications. Schneider and Yin (2011) discovered that government officials spent billions of dollars on students who started their community college journey but, ultimately, did not return to the institution. For institutions that rely heavily on local, state, and federal funding to operate, community colleges are not able to sustain the impact of students not retaining and completing their degrees. A method that some institutions have used to combat these issues are through the implementation of campus recreation facilities (Ellis, et al., 2002). In later sections, the literature review reveals findings that campus recreation facilities and programs have positive impacts on both retention and other student success measures. Along with helping students fulfill their academic responsibilities at an increased level, campus recreation has also proven to be important in students' sense of mattering.

Lastly, and possibly most importantly, sense of mattering has become a more prominent focus of ensuring student success in higher education (Forrester, 2014; Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Lower-Hoppe, et al., 2020). When students feel that they matter at their institution, it inevitably increases their performance, both socially and academically (Farrell, et al., 2018). As colleges and universities reflect on the state of their institutions, especially in the lens of student success, it is important that they consider the factors or resources that directly impact the student experience. Maslow (1954) presented that involvement is a way students can feel belongingness.

The research that follows in the literature review strongly demonstrates that campus recreation at four-year institutions serves as one of the leading areas on a college campus that has influence on students and their identity. With the versatility that campus recreation provides to college and university campuses, it is essential that community college administrators understand how this successful resource used at four-year institutions may benefit students at their very own colleges.

Purpose of the Study

Higher education research that focuses on retention and factors that impact community college students' success is plentiful. However, research that examines the correlation between student sense of mattering at community colleges and involvement in campus recreation is scarce. The goal of this qualitative case study was to discover how, if at all, campus recreation involvement increased the level that community college students feel they matter or have meaningful connections at their respective institution. Mattering, for the purposes of the research to come, is defined as, "having an emotional and meaningful connection to peers, faculty, staff, and the institution." As a result of conducting this qualitative case study, I aimed to provide college and university leaders with findings that support the benefits of mattering that come with the implementation and investment of constructing campus recreation facilities on their college or university campuses.

Research Questions

Through employing this qualitative case study, I answered the following research questions:

1. How does involvement in campus recreation impact students' sense of mattering at community colleges?
2. How do administrators think about campus recreation and its connection to student mattering?

Significance of Research Study

As campus recreation sports and programs continue to play a pivotal role in college students' development and overall experience at institutions of higher education (Forrester, 2014), college and university administrators and staff members must consider the many benefits that come along with having such programs and facilities. Some institutions throughout the nation have not only felt the impact that campus recreation and sports have on their recruitment and health promotion efforts but have also incorporated it into their institutions to declare an edge over their competitors. Many four-year institutions have not only utilized the creation of such facilities and programs to enhance their outreach efforts but have also convinced the appropriate stakeholders that being at the center of leading a healthy lifestyle

leads to an overwhelming number of benefits, both for the individuals participating and the institutions offering such services (Dalgarn, 2001; Henchy, 2011).

With the number of students entering postsecondary education increasing each year, it can be predicted that the demand for environments that enhance the student experience, such as campus recreation facilities, will continue to rise. While NIRSA and some individual universities and colleges have conducted research specific to their populations or criteria (Henchy, 2011, Ellis, et al., 2002; Patterson & Dorwart, 2019; Soria, et al., 2022), there is still an abundance of research to be conducted around this topic in community colleges. It is apparent that campus recreation sports and programs have gained recognition and monetary support from many four-year institutions, but there is a need to identify the value that these programs and facilities may bring to the community college space.

Through conducting this qualitative case study, administrators and local government officials may develop a better understanding of how investing in and implementing campus recreation programs and facilities may contribute to several student experience outcomes. Specifically, these stakeholders may find that student involvement in these programs and facilities increases their overall sense of mattering, which ultimately increases outcomes such as increased retention and academic success.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's Marginality and Mattering (1989) framework was used, due to the five elements it uses to explore mattering. Additionally, this framework was chosen in place of theories around belonging because it aligned better in the context of students' involvement with campus recreation. Specifically, there were several theories that crossed over between belonging and connectedness, therefore presenting more of a challenge to narrow in on specific interactions or experiences student participants may have encountered. Mattering is the theory that focuses on an individual's identification of feeling needed, interested in, and be cared about by others.

Given that campus recreation focuses heavily on student well-being, this theory made sense to use, as it not only helps identify how others express their dependence and interest, but also their concern with the impact of one's actions. Schlossberg (1989) states, "mattering refers to our belief, whether right

or wrong, that we matter to someone else” (p. 3). This theory provides a framework that allows for the facilitation and measuring of a qualitative case study. Specifically, Schlossberg (1989) identified five aspects that aid in determining the level in which an individual feels a sense of mattering, including attention, importance, ego-extension, appreciation, and dependence.

Schlossberg’s (1989) five constructs can be applied to this research topic as factors in creating student mattering. Specifically, these constructs can be applied to campus recreation in several ways: 1.) Attention focuses on whether someone acknowledges another person. Do two people who work out at the fitness center daily acknowledge each other? Not only does acknowledging others play a role in this construct, but it also helps place a focus on caring about one another through the lens of importance. 2.) Importance focuses on others’ care for well-being, actions, or thoughts. This may lend itself to two people who work out at the fitness center ensuring that the other is performing an exercise correctly and lessening the chances for injury. While it can be tough to sometimes ask for help, campus recreation spaces have the potential to redefine or eliminate the need for egos. 3.) Ego-extension emphasizes the individual’s desire to make another individual feel specific emotions, such as happiness and sadness. This may be seen through an individual celebrating another after accomplishing a new personal best mile time. Much like ego-extension, the construct of appreciation also proves to be an effective way to enhance mattering. 4.) Appreciation highlights the belief that one’s efforts are appreciated by others. An example of this may be seen through one cleaning the gym equipment after they have used it. Many recreational facilities have expectations that they have established for the culture of the organization, which leads us to the last construct of dependence. 5.) Dependence is the belief that others will be impacted by the decisions or actions the individual carries out. A student employee who is late to their fitness center shift may ultimately cause more than one person to be unable to use the facilities. Applying Schlossberg’s (1989) tenets to campus recreation at colleges allows a plausible connection to mattering.

The selection of Schlossberg’s theory of mattering was used for my qualitative case study because it employs a phenomenological approach to identifying appropriate questions and findings that will answer my research questions. As Schlossberg (1989) noted, “by examining mattering across spheres

of life, we can get a more complete picture of the individual. People may feel they matter too much at home and not enough at work. This information provides some guidelines for intervention” (p.5).

Creswell (2009) explained, these types of theoretical frameworks allow the researcher to better understand the phenomenon that everyone has experienced. Additionally, the use of theories in qualitative research is important in assisting researchers in identifying what issues are important to investigate, along with what groups may be vital to study (Creswell, 2009). Lastly, Creswell (2009) shared that the use of theory in qualitative research is important in helping the researcher position themselves in the study. For the purposes of my study, I positioned myself in an up-front manner, with the intention of ultimately collaborating with the participants to establish recommendations for further research.

In addition to Creswell’s (2009) guidance for utilizing theory in qualitative research, it is important to share how Schlossberg’s theory of Mattering has been successful in other research studies. I gained my appreciation for this theoretical framework from a study focused on the role of faculty and student interactions. In this study, Annelise Goodman (2022) employed a quantitative instrument that measured mattering of 79 post-traditional college students and 14 faculty members and their perceptions of interacting with one another. Goodman utilized Schlossberg’s (1989) dimensions to measure the extent to which participants felt a sense of mattering. What Goodman found was that both students and faculty, alike, shared that a feeling of mattering was important in establishing strong relationships with one another.

Additionally, faculty relationships were found to be essential in post-traditional students’ sense of mattering, as faculty and students have consistent exposure to one another throughout a student’s time at their respective institution. The findings of Goodman’s (2022) study support Schlossberg’s (1989) theory that students who have higher perceptions that they matter are more likely to retain and be involved.

As I took the necessary steps in conducting my qualitative case study, it was apparent that Schlossberg’s theory of Mattering was most effective in helping me better understand the impact that campus recreation facilities and programs have on students’ sense of mattering or connectedness. Through employing this research, I have the ability and data to inform community college administrators

and personnel that “the creation of environments that clearly indicate to all students that they matter will urge them to greater involvement” (Schlossberg, 1989, p.7).

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the impact(s) that involvement in campus recreation has on college students' sense of mattering at a medium-sized community college, located in Central Virginia of the United States. In addition to uncovering the impact that involvement in campus recreation has on this population of students, this research also sought to contribute valuable research around campus recreation at community colleges. In preparation to conduct this research, I reviewed literature pertaining to community colleges, retention, mattering, and campus recreation at colleges and universities. In the literature review to follow, I have identified some areas that aid in supporting the need for this important research to be conducted; these areas include retention, belonging and campus recreation at postsecondary institutions of education.

Role of Community Colleges

There are approximately 1,500 community colleges in the United States (Morse & Brooks, 2023). Not only do these colleges account for approximately one third of colleges and universities in the country, but they also account for 36% of undergraduate students in the United States (Community College Research Center, 2023). As postsecondary education becomes more prominent to the lives of many individuals, especially traditional aged students (18-25) from diverse backgrounds, community colleges serve as a more cost efficient and accessible option to acquiring a better and more sustainable life. Community colleges play a vital role in the marketplace of postsecondary education and help to ensure that, regardless of one's circumstances or background, they can continue their learning quest. (Margarit & Kennedy, 2019).

Students who acquire an associate degree have a yearly income that is approximately \$10k more than those who solely have a high school degree (Ma & Pender, 2023). In an economy where annual income has become increasingly important, it is vital that college students, specifically community

college students, complete their degree in a timely manner. A key component to ensuring that this demographic of students achieve degree completion relies on institutions taking the necessary steps to retain students. Recent research has found themes of programs, initiatives, and activities that colleges and universities implement having impacts on students and their ability or desire to return to the institution at the conclusion of a semester. (Boyd, et al., 2022).

Importance of Retention

Retention is important to the success that colleges and universities have. Whether reflecting on financial stability, reputation, or increased satisfaction with the student experience, colleges and universities have a responsibility to ensure that their students retain at a high rate (Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2023). Retention continues to have an increasing importance among community colleges. In 2022, 61% of students attending public, two-year institutions retained, compared to 82% of their peers attending four-year public institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). This is extremely important, as it displays how community college students are at a disadvantage compared to their four-year peers. Additionally, the impact that attending college and not acquiring a degree has on students is unsettling. Students who attend college or university and do not graduate are more likely to undergo challenges, such as limited earning potential, less qualified for specific jobs, and a lower likelihood of leading a healthy life (Bona, 2018; Andrews & Swanston, 2024).

Financial Implications

Colleges and universities across the country continuously place an emphasis on their retention efforts. Not only does retaining students assist institutions in achieving their mission, but it also helps sustain other important areas within the institution, such as their financial means and status in the marketplace (DeBerard, et al., Raisman, 2013). Many institutions, particularly those that are within the public-sphere, rely heavily on student retention to operate (Ortagus, et al., 2020). The financial benefits that come with enrollment allow institutions to have the appropriate resources and staffing to accommodate the needs that individual students have. It is vital that students who make the investment in their education can reap the benefits, such as better employment options, the ability to lead a healthier

lifestyle, and the knowledge to contribute to a more sustainable global society (Ma & Pender, 2023). As Scott, et al. (2008) shared:

Retention at university matters. It matters morally, as we know the life chances of people who complete a degree are dramatically improved. It matters financially, as students who leave a university before graduation take their fees with them. And it matters nationally, as the higher the education level of the population, the greater the nation's levels of productivity and innovation. (p.9)

Not only does retention have a positive impact on students reaching their academic and professional goals, but it also assists in ensuring a sustainable life for them. Additionally, retention has an increasing importance for the institution. For every student who leaves the institution prior to completing his or her degree, there are tuition dollars that their respective institution is no longer receiving, therefore causing heightened financial strain. Students who retain have a host of opportunities and benefits that contribute to the goal of leading a better life.

Retention Benefits

Institutions that successfully retain students not only benefit internally, through having higher student satisfaction or healthier financial status, but they also contribute greatly to the community and society around them by serving as a viable option for a diverse community, both traditional and non-traditional-aged students (Martinez & Munsch, 2019). As Beer (2016) asserts, Black and Hispanic students at community colleges make up 39% of the student population, which champions that providing diverse individuals with an opportunity for further learning can be a strong and sensible way to increase the educational attainment of the generations to come.

While conversations around retention continue to happen on most college and university campuses, it is particularly important to community college campuses. Serving a diverse group of students, community colleges undergo a different set of challenges than their four-year peers. Many community colleges rely on state funding to provide a quality education for their students. In most public community college systems, state funding is allocated to institutions at a much lower rate per-student than

their four-year counterparts (Edgecombe, 2022). Not only is this unsettling, but it leaves community colleges to rely heavily on tuition revenue to operate (Jenkins, 2023).

Retention and Age

In addition to the systematic challenges that impact community colleges' ability to retain students, there has been extensive research that identifies age, gender, and first-generation student status as factors that impact retention rates among community college students.

In a mixed-methods study conducted at a community college in the Great Plains region of the U.S., Gannon and Chambers (2023) found that students under the age of 35 had higher rates (39-53%) of retention than those above the age of 35. Researchers also found that the rationale behind students not retaining at the institution was due primarily to academics, finances, personal, family, or other challenges. Among these five categories, it is important to note that some of the student participants who identified "personal" reasons for not retaining specifically shared that a lower sense of mattering was the reason.

In contrast to Gannon and Chambers' (2023) study, a quasi-experimental study focused on examining the reasons that first-year community college students leave their respective college, researchers found that traditional aged students (19-24 years of age) were 25.7% less likely to retain than their older peers (Windham, et al., 2014). This study placed a focus on first-year students at this community college and their participation in a student success course. These findings demonstrate that not only did participation in the success course predict higher retention, but age also was a strong predictor. Researchers detail that students who are faced with some of the identified challenges may have to make hard decisions about their education and other obligations (e.g., employment), therefore leading to them not retaining.

Compiled research has indicated that age is a strong determining factor on whether an individual retains at their institution. Some research has identified that non-traditional-aged students fare better with the demands and rigor of a college curriculum, while other findings supported the opposite claim. While each study contributed a different lens to the impact age has on student retention at colleges and universities, it is evident that age is a factor that must be considered when discussing retention. When

considering age as a factor for student retention in colleges and universities, research also shows that race and ethnicity plays a role in the success of students.

Retention and Race/Ethnicity

In addition to age being identified as a characteristic impacting community college student retention, race and ethnicity also has an impact on the retention of community college students, especially students of underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. When discussing students who are members of underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, it is worth noting that in 2016, Hispanic students accounted for nearly a quarter (24%) of all community students, with Black students following at 15% (Beer, 2016). These statistics are important when discussing community college student retention due to the disparities of both Hispanic/Latino (38.4%) and Black (31.6%) students completing an associate degree at a lower rate than their white (51.1%) peers at community colleges (Dembicki, 2023). Historically, Black and Hispanic students at colleges and universities are less likely to retain and graduate than their peers. With Black and Hispanic students making up such a high percentage of the student population at community colleges, this lack of retention and graduation can be alarming for higher education professionals and administrators. A lack in retention of these demographics of students at these institutions suggests several things: these students are not being met where they are, they are not successfully adapting to the culture of the institution, and these students are possibly facing other factors that the structure of the institution is failing to address (Martinez & Munsch, 2019; Brooms, 2019). The impact that low retention for these students has on the institution can be traced back to several areas, including state and local funding for the college, hindered reputation, and possibly reaccreditation challenges (Miotto, et al., 2020).

The 2014 study conducted by Windham et al. supports this claim, finding that 50% of community college students stop-out before completing their degree. Gannon and Chambers (2023) found that only 37% of the Black students retained at the studied institution, compared to 51% and 59% retention rates of their white and Asian peers, respectively. In the quantitative study conducted by Baker and Robnett (2012), the researchers examined what differences in the student experience occurred for students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. Students who retained at higher rates had targeted support from their

institutions. For example, Black students were more likely to feel supported, but also participated in study groups and organizations more than their Latino peers. This not only highlighted that increased involvement contributed to students feeling more supported, but it also introduced the impact that obligations had on students.

A unique component of this study was the differences between on-campus and off-campus connections or obligations that Black students had compared to their Latino peers (Baker & Robnett, 2012). The researchers established what may be a cultural difference between the two student groups. Latino students had much higher familial obligations, which in turn may be a large challenge when retaining and, ultimately, completing their degree. While it is apparent that colleges must find better strategies to help retain specific student populations, it presents an opportunity for student affairs professionals and administrators to examine outside of the classroom experiences that will aid in these efforts.

As we have learned through other research studies over the last few decades, students who are more involved in extracurricular activities are more likely to succeed in their college endeavors, including having higher retention rates than their less involved peers (Astin, 1984; King, et al., 2021; Buckley & Lee, 2021). To align with the research to follow, I examined other forms of research that focused on student retention as it pertained to their participation in campus recreation activities or use of facilities.

Student Activities and Retention

Many colleges and universities are expanding their co-curricular offerings, both as a means of being competitive in the higher education marketplace and to entice students to their campuses (Mintz, 2020). Specifically, campus recreation facilities and programs have quickly gained the attention of many practitioners and administrators across college and university campuses. In a research study conducted in a mid-sized Canadian institution, researchers discovered that students who participated in campus recreation programs retained at their institution at a higher rate than students who did not participate (Forrester, et al., 2018). Specifically, of the 461 intramural recreation participants identified in the study, 99% retained from fall to the following fall in their second year at the institution, while only 85% of all

undergraduates at the institution retained (Forrester, et al., 2018). Not only did this study reaffirm previous research (Andre, et al., 2017) that supports the effectiveness of campus recreation and intramural participation, but it also suggests that campus recreation participation is something that many administrators and student affairs professionals should consider enhancing on their college or university campuses. This study, while conducted in a four-year Canadian university, may be useful in helping student affairs professionals and administrators at community colleges, as they consider the extra benefits of such facilities. Reflecting to the earlier financial implications that student retention can have on institutions, having campus recreation facilities that also have employment opportunities could be worth considering.

Another study at a four-year institution conducted by McElveen and Ibele (2019) examined campus recreation and its relationship to student-athletes and participants of intramural sports. Their findings support that participation in campus recreation assists in retaining first-year college students. Specifically, students involved in intramural sports retained at a rate above 90%. Additionally, the researchers found that the same group of students did not gain any edge in their academic success because of being a member of a team or participant in intramural sports, but rather had between 0.02 and 0.03 lower GPA than non-participants. This suggests that while being a member or participant in intramurals is likely to predict students' desire to stay at their institution, it does not necessarily mean that they will outperform their peers, academically.

Aside from participating in intramural recreation as students, some of the participants in the study were student employees. Forrester, et al., (2018) uncovered that student employees' yearly retention at the institution was over 90%. While this study contributes to the argument of why campus recreation facilities and programs are important, it is limited in that it was conducted at a university outside of the U.S. This may impact how generalizable the study may be at American institutions, especially that of a much different demographic, such as community colleges. This study shows that campus recreation involvement has positive outcomes for students and their retention. My qualitative case study will contribute to this existing research by exploring how similar experiences translate to community college

students' success outcomes. Specifically, my study will add insight on how community college students' involvement in campus recreation has influenced their decision to stay at their institution. Not only will this aid in supporting prior research findings, but it will broaden the lens of other areas that involvement in campus recreation has influence over, such as students' sense of mattering.

Identifying Student Belonging

The importance of belonging has been deemed essential for humans for decades. "In college, feeling a sense of belonging may lead students to engage more deeply with their studies, leading to persistence and success" (Gopalan & Brady, 2020, p. 134). Abraham H. Maslow developed the hierarchy of needs for the first time in 1954. Among the five needs identified by Maslow is the need for belonging or acceptance (Maslow, 1954). This suggests that humans, by nature, need to feel a sense of belonging to thrive in the world. When applied to the field of higher education, many experiences can assist students in developing a sense of belonging. With extensive research focused on belonging, this portion of my literature review was developed to establish my basis for using mattering.

Belonging and Space

Not only do students develop a sense of belonging through their involvement in organizations, clubs, or recreational activities, but they also do so by using campus facilities. Research has found that space is something that contributes to a student's college experience. For instance, the characteristics of a specific space can aid in one's involvement or engagement with the physical space and those in it (Strange & Banning, 2015). Strange and Banning (2015) described the impact of physical space being something that takes effect at the onset of students beginning to consider institutions and continuing into their role as alumni. A qualitative study conducted at a university in the United Kingdom explored how physical spaces across a college campus impacted student belonging. The study proved to be unique in that it, being a qualitative study with focus groups, allowed students to lend their perspective to the conversation. Researchers found that students viewed spaces with an emotional lens, placing an emphasis on how aspects of the space (use of light, greenery, etc.) made them feel (Mulrooney & Kelly, 2020).

While this study focused on a variety of spaces outside of campus recreation facilities, it does suggest that physical spaces are important to students on college campuses.

Belonging with People in Spaces

Strange and Banning (2015) also discussed the idea of how space as an environment plays a role in student involvement and belonging. This presents that identifying or participating in an environment that consists of individuals with similar thought processes or interests has a positive outcome on the way in which an individual sees themselves fitting into that environment or space. Windham, et al. concluded in their 2014 study that institutions must create environments where students can thrive and feel connected to others. Aligned with joining organizations filled with likeminded people, physical spaces provide students with a place that they can go and feel welcomed or that they belong.

While Mulrooney and Kelly (2020) initially focused on physical space, their research assisted in better understanding the factors that go into how students identify with or become comfortable within an environment. In alignment with this study, Makubuya, et al. (2020) examined student satisfaction with their campus recreation facility at a mid-west institution. Makubuya et al. (2020) concluded that not only did students feel a level of connectedness through personal relationships established in the facility, but also through the healthy habits they were able to adopt from the environment produced by the facility. Specifically, students identified the relationships they built with others, best practices for coping, and accessibility as components of leading a healthy lifestyle. This study is extremely helpful when considering the population to be studied.

Many community college students attend non-residential institutions, which means they may not have access to connect or have built-in resources like some of their on-campus, four-year peers, such as facilities and streamlined engagements or activities. Having established that community college students are a very diverse group, having a campus recreation facility to provide similar services as that in the study, would be instrumental in ensuring community colleges are helping shape the whole student.

Another research study found this to be true, but more so for male students participating in weight training engagements (Shaikh et al., 2018). Shaikh, et al. (2018) examined how students felt in the

physical environment of a campus recreation facility on their campus. Students who felt comfortable with physical activity had higher usage rates than those who were not as comfortable. Findings from this study also revealed that participants who had confidence in their self-image felt more comfortable in the campus recreation environment (Shaikh, et al., 2018). The results of this study present an important consideration for campus recreation professionals and institutions, as they think about best practices and strategies for ensuring that spaces are inclusive to the student population who will be using them. While this study provides a deeper lens on gender and participation or mattering in the campus recreation environment, it also supports the claims of other research, specifically, frequency leading to increased levels of connectedness.

Belonging at Colleges/Universities

As students enter colleges and universities across the nation, many of them may have a predetermined idea of what college is. Those whose parents attended a college or university may have a different outlook or set of expectations of what college is compared to their first-generation or first-in-family peers. As an essential human need, belonging resides as one of the key expectations students have for themselves. From the time students consider college, they are hoping to select an institution that they can see themselves thriving in, both academically and socially. While some expectations are easily met, others may come as a surprise on a student's journey to finding a sense of belonging.

In a research study conducted at a large community college in the Pacific Northwest, researchers investigated students' perspective of belonging at the institution and found that student participants identified three key themes: social expectations versus social actions, relationships with faculty, and connectedness (Farrell, et al., 2018). A unique component of this study is that students found purpose and connections with both peers and staff members at the institution. Farrell, et al. (2018) noted:

“The relationship between new student friendships and feeling connected to a larger student body helps elucidate that belonging to groups and being active in campus life are positive indicators of student success” (p. 81).

This finding supports that students who become active on their college or university campuses develop connections to others, which in turn, leads to them “seeing” themselves fitting into their new environment. When students discover commonalities with others on their campus, they can begin to feel a larger connection to the institution.

In a research study conducted by Gopalan and Brady (2020), first-time, first-year students were surveyed to see to what extent they felt they belonged at their respective institutions. There was a significance in feeling a sense of belonging among four-year students. This study found that while there was a significance of sense of belonging for students who were involved in campus activities, researchers did not find a significant difference for specific populations such as underrepresented minority students or first-generation students (Gopalan & Brady, 2020).

Other research has shown a correlation between student success, involvement, and belonging, suggesting that when a student is involved in extracurricular activities, they develop a community which ultimately leads to their success, both socially and academically (King, et al., 2021).

Campus Recreation and Belonging

While belonging can be found or developed in many settings along a college or university campus, campus recreation facilities serve as physical spaces where many students connect and feel they belong. Eubank and DeVita (2023) conducted a qualitative research study, using semi-structured interviews to examine students’ sense of belonging through their participation in campus recreation programs and activities. Many of the participants (66%) in the study identified participation in campus recreation programming as playing a significant role in belonging. Researchers found that students developed a sense of belonging not only through their participation in campus recreation, but also through the relationships they established with peers while engaging in such activities. For example, two participants from the study shared that seeing other individuals, regardless of the relation to them, made them feel more connected, stating that they identified a sense of commonality between them and other members at the facility. Eubank and Devita (2023) concluded that the importance of having a recreational facility can be paramount to students and their sense of belonging.

Another research study, focused on belonging of Black male students participating in campus recreation at a predominantly white institutions, supports the findings of Eubank and DeVita (2023). In their qualitative study, Patterson and Dorwart (2019) discovered that Black male student participants developed a better sense of self through participating in campus recreation programs. Much like other studies focused on campus recreation and belonging, this study also found that a significant outcome of student participation in campus recreation was the relationship building among students. This finding aligns with Schlossberg's Theory of Marginality and Mattering (1989), which emphasizes that it is vital that college students are provided with the feeling that they matter to their peers, faculty, and staff. Additionally, Schlossberg's model also highlights five stages of mattering, which include being acknowledged, caring for one's well-being, desiring to make others feel certain emotions, appreciating one's efforts, and the feeling that others are depending on them. Students learn more about themselves through engaging with those who have commonalities, but they also grow into their identities through interactions with those who are different from them (Patterson & Dorwart, 2019; Soria, et al., 2022).

While scholars agree that student participation in campus recreation programs enhances their sense of belonging, Lower-Hoppe et al.'s (2020) study examining student attachment through club sports described varying levels of belonging based on inclusionary tactics. Researchers at a large public university sought to discover how involvement or membership in different sport clubs aided students in developing a greater sense of attachment to the institution. Like other studies, they found a positive significance with higher attachment due to student participation. However, they found that the club sports that promoted and facilitated more opportunities for social interaction outside of competition demonstrated greater attachment to the university by members (Lower-Hoppe, et al., 2020). These findings suggest that frequency of social interactions is essential to ensuring that students' sense of belonging persists. Specifically, professionals in the campus recreation space must keep in mind that the more they can get students involved or invested, the more likely they are to have attachments and commitments to the college or university.

Additional Benefits of Campus Recreation

Building a sense of mattering among college students is one of the many benefits that campus recreation facilities bring to the table for colleges and universities across the nation. Student participation in campus recreation also lends itself to aiding students in establishing and maintaining healthy lifestyles and habits. According to a study conducted by Forrester (2014), 75% of students from across 38 colleges and universities shared that participation in campus recreation was vital in enhancing their interest and commitment to staying healthy. In a study conducted at a western university, focusing on quality of life, researchers found that the more participants engaged with campus recreation programs or activities, the higher their quality of life proved to be (Ellis, et al., 2002). Students participating in another NIRSA study indicated that participating in campus recreation programs encouraged them to stay in shape (86%), and another 56% shared that participating in campus recreation improved their overall health (Henchy, 2011).

Conclusion

In today's higher education, institutions are continuously aiming to find ways to meet students where they are. Many college and university's values highlight the importance of ensuring college student success, which includes but is not limited to, recruitment, retention, and academic success. While different in their own respect, many of these areas rely on the experience students have outside of the classroom. Referring to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954), is it essential that humans feel connected to one another or groups of people. A plethora of research has shown that the more involved students are outside of the classroom, the more likely they are to succeed. Many of the studies discussed earlier in this chapter focused on retention and belonging, as it pertains to four-year institutions.

With over a third of today's undergraduate college students being enrolled in community colleges (Community College Research Center, 2023), it is vital that researchers, administrators, and student affairs personnel uncover a better understanding of the factors impacting community college students, and how campus recreation involvement may play a role in their college communities.

Within this chapter, I also highlight the importance and impact that campus recreation facilities have on student sense of mattering. Mattering, for the purposes of the research to come, is defined as, “having an emotional and meaningful connection to peers, faculty, staff, and the institution,” is essential when considering the implementation or revitalization of campus recreation facilities and programs. Not only does it promote healthy lifestyles and choices, but they have proven to serve as a physical space in which students can “see” themselves fitting in and cultivating new and diverse experiences with the rest of their campus community.

As the data around community colleges continues to unveil the challenges with student retention, it is within the best interest of community college systems to evaluate and consider how these facilities may enhance their retention efforts. As shown in some of the current literature, community colleges rely heavily on state funding, and in some systems the better retention is, the better the funding. When students feel they matter, they retain at higher levels which, in turn, positively contributes to retention rates and ultimately saves institutions millions of dollars. While the current literature asserts good insight on the themes that exist for retention and belonging, it also proves that there is a gap in the literature surrounding a sense of mattering for community college students.

Additionally, there is little to no literature that examines the impact that campus recreation involvement has on community college students’ sense of mattering. Attempting to fill this gap in literature will not only assist in better understanding if there is a correlation between mattering and campus recreation at community colleges, but it will also contribute to a growing body of research that focuses on a large, but understudied, population of college students in the United States.

Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to address the following research questions:

1. How does involvement in campus recreation impact students' sense of mattering at community colleges?
2. How do administrators think about campus recreation and its connection to student mattering?

Through this study, I examined community college students at a medium-sized community college located in Central Virginia. As student retention at community colleges continues to be an important topic of discussion in higher education (Yu, 2017), this research will contribute to better understanding how community college students' participation in campus recreation impact their sense of mattering. I conducted this qualitative case study through an explanatory case study approach that focused on participants who were involved in campus recreation at their respective institution.

An explanatory case study approach is used when a researcher seeks to examine the cause- and-effect relationship, ultimately identifying what influences certain outcomes (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). An explanatory approach is effective when "researchers hope to gain in-depth understanding of situations and meaning for those involved" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017, p. 39). Through this approach, I provided student participants with an opportunity to share how their experience engaging with campus recreation aided in their sense of mattering.

Sample Selection

To employ my study, I sought participation from students attending a medium-sized, Central Virginia community college. The selected community college serves approximately 5,000 students, with close to 1,200 of those students being enrolled full-time (U.S. News & World Report, 2021). The highest degree offered at the institution is an associate degree. The researched institution is a member of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), which has a total of 23 colleges across the state. Like all

members of the VCCS, this institution is a commuter institution, meaning that all students enrolled travel to and from the college daily, and live off-campus.

My sample consisted of individuals who self-identified that they participated in campus recreation sports, programs, or used the fitness center at least once a week. These identified criteria among all participants allowed me to use a criterion sample. Using criterion sampling when selecting participants who possess identified characteristics leads to the intended information being sought. The primary foci of interviews with these students were to identify and better understand the experiences and programs that campus recreation has provided them and how participating in those activities impacted their student experience at the college.

In addition to interviewing students, I interviewed the Dean of Students, Coordinator of Student Engagement and Student Life (CSE&SL), and Fitness Center Manager (FCM). My interview with the Dean of Students aimed to gain insight on how they believe campus recreation contributed to the student experience, as well as how campus recreation sports and programming could be utilized to enhance student sense of mattering at the college. My interview with the CSE&SL was geared towards better understanding the student experience and how campus recreation sports and programs could advance the efforts of engaging a diverse group of students. Seeing that the CSE&SL is the direct supervisor of the FCM, this interview also focused more on strategy that the division had for making campus recreation effective at the college. Lastly, the interview I conducted with the FCM focused on the programming and activities offered to students, and the importance that they had on student participants.

Researcher Positionality

Prior to my role in student services and community engagement at a large, four-year institution, I served as the Director of Student Engagement and Student Life at the institution that I conducted the research. In this role, I managed the campus recreation facility, including the daily collection of activity data. I was also responsible for the implementation of campus recreation programs and sport offerings. Serving in this role provided me with an appreciation and understanding of how such programs operate within a community college, and the role they can play on student engagement. Additionally, during my

time in this role I had the opportunity to engage with a diverse group of students. In the four years that I served as the Director of Student Engagement and Student Life at the College, I noticed a common theme: many of the students shared that they used the campus recreation facility or participated in recreational programming because it either fulfilled their goals of establishing a healthier lifestyle or it allowed them to continue engaging in something they enjoyed doing in high school.

Reflecting on these interactions with students, I quickly developed an interest in better understanding how campus recreation facilities and programs play a role in community college students' lives. As a first-generation, limited-income college student, who attended and graduated from a four-year institution that had a top-tiered campus recreation facility and program, I was subject to biases of my personal experience and beliefs that campus recreation facilities, sports, and programs play a large role in students' sense of mattering.

Due to my experience and exposure to the student population, staff, and campus recreation facility, my credibility to both collect and interpret the data for this research was significant. I used my role as the researcher to perform semi-structured interviews with students, administrators, and staff members who participated in campus recreation or provided campus recreation services. Creswell (2018) shared that, "this up-close information gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research" (p. 180). However, I acknowledged that my relationship with the facility and individuals involved could lead to bias or me developing conclusions. To ensure that I remained credible as the researcher, I made clear how my personal experience as a former professional staff member of the institution may have influenced my approach to data collection. Specifically, I had my interview protocols for both students and administrators/staff reviewed by someone who was not affiliated with the institution or its campus recreation program.

Additionally, to make certain that I respected participants and the facility, I applied for approval to conduct my research from the college's Institutional Review Board (IRB). As part of this approval request, I reviewed an informed consent form with participants and received their verbal agreement and

understanding before proceeding with the research. Through the guidance of Creswell (2018), I made sure the informed consent form acknowledged that the rights of all participants were respected and would be protected through the entirety of my research and data collection.

Seeing that the institution had policies that did not allow me to interview participants in-person on their campus, I conducted interviews with all participants over Zoom. I conducted interviews with students and administrators/staff on Zoom to ensure that the interviews were not disruptive to the activities occurring in the environment, along with abiding by the policies set forth by the institution. Following the semi-structured interviews, I began discovering themes and coding the data. A report of these themes and anonymous quotes were used in the development of a presentation for the FCM, CSE&SL, and Dean of Students. As gatekeepers, the FCM, CSE&SL, and Dean of Students would have the opportunity to identify what practices, programs, events, etc. were contributing to a sense of mattering among students who were involved in campus recreation. Additionally, these findings will provide insight and suggestions on what areas within this student service could be improved or taken under consideration by the institution and the VCCS.

Instrumentation

To effectively conduct my qualitative case study, I employed two interview protocols: one protocol was geared towards the perspectives and experiences of students (See Appendix A), while the other focused on that of administrators and staff associated with the campus recreation facility and programs (See Appendix B). Each protocol consisted of eight open-ended questions. The protocol that was used in student interviews had questions that asked about their experience participating in campus recreation and the impact that their involvement in campus recreation had on other aspects of their lives. This protocol was derived using Eubank and DeVita's (2023) research study, which focused on recreational sports participation and belonging. The interview protocol was designed to: 1.) collect students' perspectives of their campus recreation experience; 2.) identify specific programs or activities that students gravitated to; and 3.) understand the impact that students' involvement in campus recreation had on their sense of mattering.

The second interview protocol focused on the perceptions that administrators and staff members had on the benefits associated with campus recreation at the college. This interview protocol sought to identify strategies and support that college administrators and staff had for campus recreation programs and sports. The instrument was designed to: 1.) collect administrator and staff perspectives of benefits that are direct outcomes of student participation in campus recreation; 2.) identify strategies that administrators and staff have when developing or implementing programs/initiatives; and 3.) understand what it takes to have an effective campus recreation facility and programs at a community college.

To ensure my interview protocols were sound, I had a colleague, who is familiar with case study research and my topic, review both semi-structured interview protocols. This individual simply reviewed my protocols by asking probing questions regarding each question and how it related to my theoretical framework of mattering. This assisted me in identifying pitfalls, along with areas in which my bias may have presented itself. This approach provided my research findings with both a second set of eyes, as well as someone who is knowledgeable on what to look for in case study research.

Plan for Data Collection

To ensure that I was successful in conducting my research, I worked closely with the Dean of Students and FCM to access the participants. My primary collaboration was with the Dean of Students, as I provided them with an overview of my research study and how it may influence their approach to student mattering at the college. Additionally, I worked with the Dean of Students and the Director of Institutional Research to navigate the IRB process at their institution. Most of my collaborations were with the FCM, as they were the individual facilitating the daily operations of the campus recreation facility and programs.

I conducted my qualitative case study using individual interviews. This data collection method was conducted in alignment with participant schedules. Additionally, the FCM provided access to bulletin boards for flyers with information on how to participate in the study. Zoom was selected as the platform to conduct individual interviews, due to two key reasons: 1.) it allowed participants to have flexibility of when they participated and 2.) it allowed for the policy set by the institution to be met.

As part of the selection process, students who were interested participated in a 45-60-minute-long individual interview. In selecting participants, I focused on students who had been at the institution for at least one semester and who used the fitness center at least once per-week. The rationale behind this criterion is that a student who had been at the institution at least one semester will have had an opportunity to engage with the facility and programs over the course of a 15-week semester.

Initially, my participants were exposed to flyers through the main building at the institution. These flyers had information about the study, as well as a QR code for interested students to register to participate (See Appendix C). After registering to participate, students received an email from me that explained the details of my qualitative case study, along with next steps on scheduling a Zoom interview.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to conduct this qualitative case study. Semi-structured interviews are effective in case study research because they allow the researcher to ask flexible, open-ended questions, while also allowing for follow-up questions that may provide more in-depth responses (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). In my qualitative case study, this form of interviewing allowed me to meet with the main stakeholders, including students, the Dean of Students, CSE&SL, and FCM. I chose to include students, the Dean of Students, CSE&SL, and FCM in my study because Hancock and Algozzine (2017) shared that it is vital to conduct interviews with individuals who will have the best information to help address my research questions (p. 47). These 45–60-minute interviews assisted me in better understanding each individual's perspective of campus recreation, as well as their outlook on the impact campus recreation had on students who engage with the facility or programming. Not only did it provide an opportunity for me to better understand the perceived impact that campus recreation had at different management levels, but it also helped identify the level(s) at which each individual valued the facility and programs. These interviews also assisted me in better understanding if and how campus recreation may have played a role in student mattering.

Data Handling

I utilized the Zoom application on my computer to conduct and record each semi-structured interview. After each interview I saved the file with the date and pseudonym of the participant. After saving the recording, I transcribed the recording and saved it with the same pseudonym and the word “transcription.” I ensured that this was all done in a safe manner and in accordance with IRB guidelines. During the transcription process, I identified themes and placed them in the *Delve* coding program, which allowed me to manage themes found for each of the conducted interviews. The interview protocol for students can be seen in Appendix A, and those for the Dean of Students, CSE&SL, and FCM can be found in Appendix B.

Time Frame

After identifying my participants and providing them with another overview of my qualitative case study and purpose, I began collecting my data. Given that I employed case study research, I planned for four weeks of data collection, which allowed me time to refine my research questions and identify the data that was most apt to addressing my research questions.

I used the questions from my two interview protocols (See Appendix A &B). Note, these interviews had many similarities, but I intentionally included specific questions that related to the participant’s relationship to campus recreation facilities and programs. For instance, the Dean of Students, Facility Center Manager, and Coordinator of Student Engagement and Student Life received questions geared more towards student success, strategic goals, and student satisfaction. In addition to conducting interviews with the Dean of Students, CSE &SL, and FCM, I conducted individual interviews with eight student participants. The focus of these interviews was about their experience participating in campus recreation and the impact that their involvement in campus recreation had on other aspects of their lives.

To give myself adequate time for the interviews and transcription, I spread these interviews throughout a week, allowing a day in between each, in case I found that I needed to conduct follow-up interviews with one or all of them. Once I conducted all my semi-structured interviews, I began

establishing themes from each interview, while also cross referencing them to themes found in supporting literature.

Plan for Analysis of Data

The data analysis process is a continuous process, full of reflecting and refining the data throughout the study (Creswell, 2018). To conduct my qualitative case study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each of my participants. After each interview, I set aside time to use the recordings to assist in transcribing the participant's responses. Following the transcription of each interview, I read through responses and tried to better understand what the participant was sharing with me. Specifically, I paid close attention to themes that arose and categorized those themes as I went. Additionally, I made comments on certain quotes or information shared so I could capture what my thoughts were and how they may launch other ideas or challenges of my research.

Following the transcription and identification of themes, I began my coding process. According to Creswell (2018), coding allows the researcher to bring lumps of information together before making sense of the information. I made sure that I read through my transcriptions carefully, as it aided me in having the ability to give the content of the interviews more meaning. Once I lumped together information from each interview, I found relationships between all of them and began clustering them into categories, consisting of relationships, health, community, and support. After I discovered these topics, I returned to my semi-structured interview transcriptions and began labeling each segment with the appropriate codes. I used Schlossberg's five elements of mattering (attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence, and appreciation) to guide this part of my analysis. As I read through each transcript, I highlighted responses and assigned them to the appropriate code. This ensured that I didn't have too many codes, while also providing me with a strong, sound coding system for my preliminary analysis. Given that my research was a qualitative case study, I used a narrative approach to tell the story of interconnected themes.

The interpretation of my data focused on what I learned as the researcher. My role as the researcher closely aligned with the research topic, both from a personal and professional perspective.

Based on my history participating in campus recreation as a way of enhancing my social development, as well as being the supervisor of a campus recreation facility, my interpretation assisted in helping me better understand if student involvement in campus recreation had the social impact that inspired me to conduct this study. While these experiences led to my research on campus recreation in community colleges, I made certain it did not interfere with my analysis of findings.

As I concluded my data analysis, I used member checking to determine the credibility of my findings. This strategy allowed me to use findings that I had interpreted and presented them to the participants through follow-up conversations. Participants had the opportunity to share their perspective of the findings. Creswell (2018) shares that the researcher takes back themes and other components that have been buffed and has the participants share if they believe they are accurate.

Limitations of Study

Seeing that my qualitative case study was performed at a medium-sized community college in Central Virginia, it had some limitations. With a small percentage of current, full-time students using the campus recreation facilities, obtaining an adequate sample size proved to be a limitation. In addition to a smaller sample size, participants were not reflective of the diverse student population at the institution, whether it be race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, age, etc. Lastly, this qualitative case study was also subject to limitations based on the institution being a commuter-campus. This population of students had competing interests that caused them to not participate in my study or in the general use of the campus recreation facilities.

Chapter IV

Analysis

Research focused on the impact that campus recreation facilities and programs have on college students' sense of mattering is limited to four-year institutions. With one-third of today's undergraduate students enrolled in postsecondary education at a two-year institution or community college, it is vital that this gap of research be addressed. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the impact that campus recreation involvement had on community college students' sense of connectedness. Using Schlossberg's (1989) Marginality and Mattering theoretical framework, the study focused on developing a better understanding of how participating in campus recreation made a small group of community college students feel. Specifically, this qualitative case study narrowed in on the mattering elements of Schlossberg's theoretical framework (attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence, and appreciation).

I utilized Schlossberg's (1989) Marginality and Mattering theory to frame my interview protocols, both of which were presented in the form of semi-structured, individual interviews. The data that follows is representative of the perspectives and experiences of current students and staff at a medium-sized community college in Virginia. In the text to follow, I will discuss the data collected from my individual, semi-structured interviews. The examination of data will be focused on addressing the research questions of this case study.

The following research questions drove this qualitative study:

RQ1: How does involvement in campus recreation impact students' sense of mattering at community colleges?

RQ2: How do administrators think about the impact that campus recreation involvement has on student mattering?

Participants of this qualitative case study consisted of eight current community college students and three community college administrators (Table 1) at a medium-sized community college in the state

of Virginia. Everyone participated in one semi-structured interview. The setting of this qualitative study was virtual, due to the studied institution having policies in place that did not permit soliciting or use of the campus' physical space. Zoom was the platform used to conduct interviews with all eleven participants. Interviews lasted between 33 minutes and 66 minutes, with the average interview lasting 45 minutes. Two separate interview protocols were used for students and administrators. While each interview protocol was aimed at a specific group of people, they both consisted of questions that aligned with Schlossberg's (1989) Marginality and Mattering framework. Each question focused on gaining a better understanding of the participants' perspectives of the campus recreation facility impacting or contributing to (a) attention, (b) importance, (c) ego-extension, (d) dependence, (e) appreciation.

Table 1

Role of Participants at Studied Community College

Participant Name	Role at Community College	Year(s) at Community College
Karen	Student Engagement Administrator	3
Larry	Fitness Center Administrator	6
Neal	College Administrator	18
Abby	Nursing Student	3
Bennett	General Studies Student	3
Bruce	General Studies Student	1
Christina	General Studies Student	3
Madeline	General Studies Student	2
Mark	Engineering Student	3
Seth	Computer Science Student	2
Truman	General Studies	3

Importance of Campus Recreation

Research shows that participating in extracurricular activities enhances both the student experience and the academic success a student will have (King, et al., 2021). Specifically, research suggest that students who are more physically active during their postsecondary career are more likely to maintain healthy habits after graduating, becoming employed, and have higher lifetime earnings than those who don't participate in physical activity, routinely (Forrester, 2014). Part of this qualitative research study included individual, semi-structured interviews with college administrators. These interviews were geared towards better understanding their perspective of how campus recreation contributed to their students' sense of connectedness. What these interviews unveiled were beyond just their perspectives, but included important thoughts on how it contributes to the mission and goals of the college, health outcomes, and accessibility.

Commitment to Health and Wellness

As an institution that provides educational opportunities to a very diverse group of individuals, the studied community college has a commitment to ensuring that students are provided with education on healthy choices and habits. Specifically, part of the mission that several administrators highlighted was the opportunities students had to engage with wellness. Neal, an administrative participant in this study, shared that the campus recreation facility is paramount in supporting the "larger landscape of just sort of physical and emotional and mental wellbeing that we're trying to push across campus as a whole."

Additionally, Neal shared that not only was the campus recreation facility essential to fulfilling that campus-wide push of wellbeing, but that the institution was also focusing resources on bridging the wellness gap for their employees as well.

In the next section of this chapter, I will briefly discuss two overarching themes that I found throughout conducting this study. Convenience was highlighted by participants as being important to their decision to use the campus recreation facility at the institution, which leads to a better understanding of themes found in the theoretical framework. It is also worth noting that this was developed separate from

Schlossberg's Marginality and Mattering Theory (1989). Following the conversation on convenience, I discuss each theme (importance, attention, appreciation, ego-extension, dependence), while providing direct insight into some of my interviews with study participants, including quotes and interpretations.

Accessibility

Another theme that emerged during this qualitative case study was students' access to the campus recreation facility. During individual interviews students identified convenience as being an important aspect of their experience using the campus recreation facility. It is important to note that this theme stands apart from Schlossberg's (1989) theory but proved to be complimentary to students' sense of mattering and connectedness.

Convenience

Throughout the individual interviews with both students and administrators, the theme of convenience came up several times. For the purposes of this qualitative case study, convenience is defined as the ease of accessing the physical space of the campus recreation facility. With the study being conducted at a two-year, non-residential community college, accessibility is vital to many of the students that the institution serves. Having interviewed individuals who commute to and from the institution, it was apparent that having the facility on-campus proved to be extremely beneficial to students. Some students shared that they ended up cancelling their other gym memberships, due to the campus recreation facility having better equipment and better accommodations to fitting their daily schedules.

One student participant of the study, Seth, identified convenience as being a reason he used the facility:

"I mean, I will admit I go there regularly out of the fact that it's one of like convenience and the fact that people are welcoming there."

In addition to Seth's remarks, a campus administrator of the college also shared that he has noticed how vital of a role having the facility on campus has played for students:

“I have noticed that the ability for them to be able to go to a gym that’s on campus, as opposed to having to find their way to Planet Fitness, you know, just saving the amount of time it takes to drive somewhere and park and check in and go in and get set up and ready to go.”

Having a campus recreation facility on-campus is beneficial for students who are already on-campus. The ease of being able to walk from class to the campus recreation facility is something that appeals to students, especially seeing that some students are commuting 30 plus minutes away from campus. This allows students to be more efficient with their time and provides more consistency with maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

While convenience proved to be an overarching theme that appeared in several interviews, most study participants’ perspectives and experiences aligned with Schlossberg’s Marginality and Mattering Theory (1989). Table 2 provides an overview of what you will read in the following section, pertaining to the correlation of Schlossberg’s five elements and student involvement in campus recreation.

Table 2

Thematic Findings in Alignment with Schlossberg's (1989) Marginality and Mattering

Element of Mattering	Definition	Participant Quote
Importance	The feeling that one is cared about	"It's the one spot [campus recreation center] that people will greet you personally, ask you how's your progress, and keep in touch with you."
Attention	The feeling that one is noticed	"Oh, hey man, you know, me and a bunch of other people from here [campus recreation center] are going to go bowling this Saturday. You want to come along with?"
Appreciation	The feeling that one's efforts are appreciated by others	"I gave it [the campus recreation facility] a week to see if I would like it or not and I started liking it because everybody's kind of there for the same reasons, to either gain muscle and lose weight to just make themselves a bit more healthier than they were before."
Ego-Extension	The feeling that someone will be proud of what one does or will sympathize with one's failure	"And seeing the camaraderie of, uh, like everyone being able to cheer this person on and then being able to overcome that challenge, uh, is like really just some of my favorite sights to see."
Dependence	The feeling of feeling needed	"So it's like kind of moments like that for when you're feeling down in a way and you don't want to work out by yourself, they [peers] would be like, oh, come on, let's workout together, you don't have to do it by yourself."

Importance

Among the five components found in Schlossberg's (1989) Theory, importance was a strong front-runner throughout interviews. The analysis of the individual interviews with administrators and students revealed that students' sense of feeling importance was a key outcome of their experience using campus recreation facilities and programs at the institution. Schlossberg's (1989) Marginality and

Mattering theoretical framework defines importance as an individual feeling that they are cared about. Students identified several aspects of their participation in campus recreation contributing to feeling cared about. Specifically, engaging with fitness center staff, communication with peers, and ensuring that each other is having a positive experience when using the facility. One student participant, Bruce, shared that staff at the campus recreation center are intentional about developing relationships with the students who use the space:

“It’s the one spot [campus recreation center] that people will greet you personally, ask you how’s your progress, and keep in touch with you.”

Another student, Bennett, shared that his interactions with campus recreation staff really made him feel that he was cared about:

“It would be a concept of somebody wants to see you strive for greatness, talk to me and trying to figure out how I can push myself to like higher expectation where I should be at and it just made life a little bit better just seeing that somebody does care...”

Both Bruce and Bennett’s experience engaging with campus recreation staff members demonstrates that connections between staff and students have a positive impact on their experiences. Not only is this important to contributing to students’ sense of mattering, but it also promotes the campus recreation facility as being a place where they will see familiar faces and be able to associate staff as resources to their success.

Comparable to Bruce’s interactions with staff, another student participant, Madeline, shared that the rapport she developed with specific campus recreation staff members was important to her:

“Because sometimes it’s like a certain person that you want there, that you know will help you, because it’s kind of like you’re so familiar with that person that if you don’t see them there, you’re just like, okay, then am I supposed to talk to this person that I don’t really associate with that much?”

Madeline’s experience highlights how the development of personal connections with campus recreation staff members plays a role in a students’ comfort level of using the facility and programs. This

experience provides insight on how powerful one meaningful relationship can be to students and the level to which they feel they matter.

Much like interactions that Bruce had with campus recreation center staff, he also found that his participation in the campus recreation facility provided him with opportunities to connect with peers:

“The one place that I could form relationships that besides class was the fitness center... I started going consistently, started talking to people, forming like a slow bond and then after time the bond turned into a friendship, and we would start expecting to see each other. We became really close friends after that.”

The element of importance can certainly be seen in Bruce’s remarks about connecting with peers. The development of his friendships in the campus recreation facility proved that cultivating interpersonal relationships outside of the classroom is essential to the student experience. The campus recreation facility’s welcoming environment allows students to go through the process of being strangers to becoming friends. It also sheds light on students setting personal expectations for what they want to gain from using the campus recreation facility.

Much like Bruce’s experience with developing meaningful connections with peers, another student participant, Abby, revealed that peers made her feel cared about:

“Wanting to live a healthy lifestyle and having those goals, I mean, they [peers] were there to support me or talk about whatever I needed to talk about in terms of my fitness journey or if I just blown off steam about a class or about something that happened, like they would always lend an ear and also shared their goals with me.”

Abby’s experience reiterates the how student participation in campus recreation at the college led to students feeling cared about by their peers. It also takes the concept of importance a step further, in that it also served as a safe space for students to come together and decompress, whether it be through exercising together or having the opportunity to express frustrations or concerns.

A unique aspect of this study was that some of the fitness center staff were student staff members. Through the course of interviews this proved to be a highlight to students’ experience in feeling

comfortable using the facility. One student, Christina, shared that someone who was both a peer and campus recreation staff member showed an interest in hearing about her experience using the facility:

“Like, he is not the boss of the gym, but even him being a student worker he is interested in knowing more about how other students feel being there.”

Not only did importance arise through student-to-student interactions or student to staff interactions, but it also appeared through the form of feedback. This shows that, in addition to the development and maintaining of meaningful connections with individuals, the campus recreation facility and its staff place an emphasis on getting student feedback. While most of the discussion around feedback was informal, hearing Christina’s experience indicates that the processes, activities, and operations of the facility are areas in which campus recreation staff want to better support students and their individual experiences.

Students were not the only participants who shed light on how a sense of importance was developed through students’ use of the campus recreation facility. An administrator, Larry, who participated in the research study shared his perspective of connecting with students who use the facility. When asked about how students respond to his willingness to engage with them, Larry shared:

“It’s like a big, oh my God, this person actually cares about what’s going on with me.”

Larry’s insight provides an important lens for student affairs and campus recreation professionals. It signals that students may sometimes have a perception that activities and facilities are simply resources developed by college administrators to provide the student population with things to do. However, administrators like Larry show that a large percentage of these offerings are intended to build strong and meaningful connections, and more importantly, a community that fosters mattering.

Feeling a sense of importance when using the campus recreation facility was highlighted as being paramount to students’ sense of connectedness at the college. Students who had positive interactions with campus recreation staff and peers demonstrated a higher level of satisfaction with their experience at the institution. Additionally, many students shared that building meaningful relationships with staff and peers played a part in their decision to continue attending the college. The development of meaningful

connections is pivotal in the development of college students. Finding an environment that actively provides students with that opportunity is significant.

Attention

A second outcome that emerged from the analysis of the individual interviews was attention. Schlossberg's (1989) Marginality and Mattering theoretical framework defines attention as an individual feeling that they are noticed. Student participants emphasized that their use of the campus recreation facility enhanced the connections that they had with their peers. Additionally, administrators highlighted that the facility provided opportunities for faculty and staff to engage with students in a more informal manner, along with providing more opportunities for diverse groups of students to interact with one another. One student participant, Mark, shared that his experience using the campus recreation facility led to off-campus connections with his peers:

“Oh, hey man, you know, me and a bunch of other people from here [campus recreation center] are going to go bowling this Saturday. You want to come along with?”

The campus recreation facility is not only serving as an institutional resource to students regarding their health, but it is assisting in students developing meaningful relationships with one another outside of campus. This instance demonstrates that the facility has an environment where students notice each other and try to strengthen their connections. Much like the theme of importance, the analysis of the interviews also found that campus recreation staff played a part in making students feel seen. When asked what happens when she misses some time from using the campus recreation facility, Abby shared that her absence was noticed by staff:

“Like, hey, when are you coming back to the gym...we miss you.”

Another student participant, Bruce, had a similar experience with campus recreation staff checking on him. When asked about his interactions with the campus recreation staff, he shared that he had injured himself and had not been using the facility for a while, going on to share that the campus recreation staff has kept in contact with him:

“And so the center [staff], they've been keeping check on me even today about my surgery.”

The campus recreation staff's process of building connections with students who use the facility proves to contribute to students' sense of feeling noticed. In addition to one's absence being noticed, a deeper level of attention can be seen by the campus recreation staff's efforts to maintain communication with students during their absence. Also, it presents a potential best practice, as both students shared that the campus recreation staff noticing that they had not been in the facility after a while also played a role in their return to the facility and programs. The emphasis on following up with students can serve as an effective way to retain students.

One campus recreation staff member, Larry, also provided some insight into the campus recreation team's practice of paying attention to students:

"Yeah, so I always worry when I have a student that's been extremely consistent and they just kind of disappear, as an employee, I will sit down sometimes and look them up on Navigate or SIS."

Although interviews did not include all campus recreation staff members, it was very apparent through other interviews that ensuring students felt noticed was important to the staff. In addition to the practice of making note that specific students may have not been present for some time, another administrator expressed that their hope for the campus recreation facility was that it could work as a connection tool for faculty and staff members. With many higher education professionals only having time to connect with students in one-on-one meetings or during weekly class time, it can be a challenge to find meaningful ways to connect with students, especially those attending a commuter-structured community college. When asked about other benefits of the campus recreation facility, Neal, an administrator that participated in this qualitative study, shared that the facility had benefits beyond the physical ones:

"And so yeah, I mean, I think that's one of the other benefits of the fitness center is that while it's first and foremost student facing, because there are faculty and staff that go there as well and use it during the open hours, there's an opportunity for faculty and staff to sort of interface with students in a way that's challenging to do in other types of environments on campus."

There was a consistent theme among all participants that highlighted the campus recreation facility being a place of neutrality. When students, faculty, and staff used the facility, the playing field or dynamic seemed to shift. It was no longer that the individual exercising across the room was seen as the same individual who would be conducting an exam or grading assignments.

Another area where attention was identified was through diverse groups of students having lower-stake opportunities to engage with one another. Neal, an administrator at the college, shared that in his tenure at the institution he has witnessed the campus recreation facility shaping these opportunities:

“I’ve noticed in my many years going to the fitness center that you will often see students who might not have the opportunity to interact in classes, have the opportunity to interact in their fitness.”

As highlighted earlier, the campus recreation facility and staff curated an environment that welcomes a very diverse group of students. For students attending a non-residential community college, having the ability to develop relationships with peers in other environments, all while doing so on tight schedules, the campus recreation proved to bridge the gap between students of different backgrounds and interests.

The campus recreation facility proved to foster an environment where participants felt that they were noticed. The college’s focus on making the campus recreation facility a place that is welcoming to a diverse group of students was evident throughout individual interviews. Additionally, campus recreation staff’s intentional efforts to connect with students, both when they were using the facility and when they may have not been present for a few days, was paramount in contributing to students feeling noticed. Aligning well with students feeling cared about, being noticed serves as an important factor to students feeling connected, both to their institution and the individuals there.

Appreciation

Receiving Appreciation

Throughout the individual interviews, the theme of appreciation appeared consistently. Schlossberg’s (1989) Marginality and Mattering theoretical framework defines appreciation as one

feeling that their efforts are appreciated by others. Students who participated in this study shared that the campus recreation facility and the individuals who used it had a certain level of respect that was given to all who used the facility. Specifically, these interviews unveiled that everyone using the space appreciated the efforts by both campus recreation staff and their peers. Appreciation almost emerged as an unwritten pillar that the campus recreation facility valued. If one used the facility, their peers and staff appreciated their presence and commitment to developing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. This theme also presented some unique findings, such as students showing appreciation to the staff for both the equipment and experience that they gained from their use of the campus recreation facility.

Madeline, a student participant of the study, shared that she initially was hesitant about using the campus recreation facility. She finally overcame that hesitation due to acknowledging why people use the facility:

“I gave it [the campus recreation facility] a week to see if I would like it or not and I started liking it because everybody’s kind of there for the same reasons, to either gain muscle and lose weight to just make themselves a bit more healthier than they were before.”

Madeline’s experience using the campus recreation facility seemed to come as a surprise to her, as the environment and individuals participating had more commonalities than differences. The opportunity for students to come together and work towards a common goal signified a level of respect and appreciation that was held throughout the study.

Like Madeline’s perspective of using the campus recreation facility with other peers, another study participant, Christina, expressed an appreciation of seeing her professors and advisors using the facility:

“But you do still get to see similar faces and there is that opportunity for being able to relate to the fact that we’re [students and faculty] using the same facility to work out.”

When students had the opportunity to engage with their faculty and staff outside of the classroom or offices, it served as a common ground and an opportunity for a different type of connection to be made. Students were able to shift their perspectives of their faculty and staff from superiors to other individuals

exercising to better themselves and their health. This is vital, due to the community college landscape being one that lessens the opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to have intentional interactions during the week. Many students are either in class and then heading off-campus for work or other obligations, or many staff and faculty are limited to the eight-hour workday, with very little possibility of them running into a student at a different part of campus.

Another study participant, Truman, shared how a connection he made with a campus recreation staff member made him feel about his own use and commitment to using the facility and programs:

“Motivated, and also like, I gained a massive respect for him [campus recreation staff member] because it’s, in motivation-wise, it’s like oh, like, somebody like really focused on this [fitness], improved themselves drastically, but also it’s like you have a huge respect for somebody who does that because that’s a great thing and that’s a great challenge.”

The conversation with Truman shared that students having the opportunity to hear and learn more about the staff and administrators at the college is something that heightened appreciation. Much like seeing their faculty and staff working out, when students are given the chance to get to know faculty and staff on a more personal level it assists in students having a different viewpoint. It also seems that providing some insight into one’s own journey made Larry more relatable and someone that students may find to be a resource they can go to and seek guidance. Like some other facets of Schlossberg’s theory, appreciation proves to be shared with both students and administrators.

In addition to being appreciated for using the campus recreation facility and showing a sense of satisfaction, individual interviews uncovered that campus recreation staff also appreciated students who adopted their mission to help others in their pursuit for a healthier life. Bruce, a student participant, shared that one campus recreation staff member sent him a personal email, thanking him for helping a peer who was struggling to use the equipment located in the facility:

“He [campus recreation staff member] emailed me personally to thank me for doing my best to try to help this person... and one thing I’d like to add about the fitness center is that the faculty, they take note of everything, and even good deeds, and I think that’s a really important part.”

Bruce's feeling appreciated is something that adds to the importance of students feeling that they matter. When an administrator takes the time to acknowledge the efforts of a student, it proves to be important in enhancing the connection that exists at the campus recreation facility. Not only are students feeling a sense of appreciation for being engaged in the campus recreation environment, but they are gaining a sense of appreciation for being present and helping others in their pursuits. The acknowledgement by campus recreation staff demonstrates to students that they are appreciated, both inside and outside of the facility.

Giving Appreciation

In a separate interview with a campus recreation staff member, they shared that students often express their appreciation through complimenting the equipment and work that has been done to make the facility more robust and diverse for its users. Larry, an administrator at the college, shared that some students who have attended other institutions of higher education have even voiced their surprise to the quality of the campus recreation facility:

"You know I was a student a long time ago and this looks completely different, and this equipment is much nicer and it's cleaner and the majority of the feedback is good...and in some cases some of those students believe it envies some of the equipment at four-year colleges, which is awesome to hear."

Students' appreciation for the environment the campus recreation staff has created shows that the financial investment and thought that has been given to the design is paying off. Students have indicated their satisfaction with the facility and some students shared that they cancelled prior memberships to larger gyms. This appreciation by students is a huge compliment to the commitment that the college and campus recreation staff have to advancing ways to support the whole student.

Another aspect of one of the individual interviews that highlighted appreciation shown by campus recreation staff was the openness to feedback from students. Larry, an administrator at the college, shared about a time where a student provided feedback and a suggested activity for the campus recreation facility to try:

“So we did that [suggested rock climbing activity], we put that on, we got 15 students together, I paid for it beforehand, and they all went on a Friday in like September...so it was a neat opportunity that ended up not being my idea, but it was a great idea and we ran with it.”

Larry’s willingness to allow a student to present and facilitate an idea shows both appreciation and trust. I believe this contributes to the strength of the relationships that students shared throughout their interviews. This demonstrates that when students have some autonomy and a voice in the programs and activities offered, it can be extremely beneficial to both parties. It also shows the commitment that the campus recreation staff has to ensure that students are having the best possible student experience.

These unique events display a mutual respect between campus recreation staff and students. Students demonstrate an appreciation of the work and energy that staff has put into developing a safe and comfortable space that they benefit from. Staff have an appreciation for the feedback students provide and the satisfaction they get from using the campus recreation facility. In addition to the effort put forward by both parties, they ultimately appreciate the commitment to healthy choices that each show daily.

Ego-Extension

Individuals who partake in physical activity may do so for several reasons, one being to make themselves or others feel proud or impressed with their actions or practices. Within this qualitative case study, I uncovered that the studied campus recreation facility created opportunities for individuals to find events or interactions that provided them with these feelings. Schlossberg’s (1989) Marginality and Mattering theoretical framework defines ego-extension as one feeling that someone else will be proud of what one does or will sympathize with one’s failure. Through conducting these individual interviews, the number of participants who focused on their achievements and very little on their failures was interesting. Findings from these interviews suggest that the campus recreation facility, along with the staff, faculty, and one’s peers, provided students with levels of ego-extension. Much like other elements of Schlossberg’s (1989) framework, ego-extension was closely tied to the environment of the campus recreation facility. Specifically, the culture of supporting one another and being in the process together strongly emerged.

Several study participants shared stories about times that they achieved a goal or felt a sense of success while using the campus recreation facility. Surprisingly, many of their stories were very similar to one another, in that they tended to be based on hitting a personal record themselves or being a part of a group that was cheering on a peer while they pursued a record or achievement.

Mark, a student participant in the study, shared two stories: one about a time he hit a personal record, and secondly, a time that he witnessed someone else hitting a personal record:

“Having those couple of guys like around me and supporting and cheering me on, like, that’s how I was able to break my previous record.”

Along with his personal achievement, he shared that of a peer:

“And seeing the camaraderie of, uh, like everyone being able to cheer this person on and then being able to overcome that challenge, uh, is like really just some of my favorite sights to see.”

Bruce, another student participant, shared a similar experience when he achieved a goal while using the campus recreation facility:

“It felt almost like a brotherhood there, like we were all just rooting for each other, and it was awesome and a lot of fun...we had about seven or eight people watching us like go back-to-back-to-back PR and we were just screaming and hollering away.”

Both Mark and Bruce’s experiences with reaching a goal or supporting a peer in reaching a goal gives insight into the campus recreation environment that has been created at the college. Students have established a norm to push one another to get better, while also supporting each other in times that they don’t meet a goal or personal record. Some of the behavior described by students also indicate that the campus recreation facility is a place where groups of students come together with the intentions of cheering their peers on.

As with other themes that arose during this study, ego-extension did not stop at a peer-to-peer level. One student, Abby, expressed that the campus recreation staff made her feel as if they were proud of her accomplishments and efforts:

“... the staff there, after I got done running, they would praise me, and I’d be able to share like, oh, today I was able to do this, and I feel really good about it.”

Mirroring the theme found throughout this study, campus recreation staff are intentional about celebrating students’ success. Having a staff member show they are proud of you can elevate a student’s sense of mattering. While students indicated that they primarily worked out for personal reasons, it was also apparent that having the approval or praise from someone other than their peers had a positive impact on their experience participating in campus recreation activities.

Ego-extension proved to be an element within Schlossberg’s (1989) theoretical framework that appeared in the interview responses from participants. Many of the student participants of the study shared that the support and encouragement that came from peers and staff were important to them and played a role in making them feel a sense of belonging when using the campus recreation facility. While Schlossberg (1989) states that ego-extension is when an individual feels that someone else will be proud of their efforts or sympathize with their failure, all eight of the student participants shared stories only about how proud people were of them for their successes. When asked additional questions about failures or coming up short on a goal, each student shared that they don’t really focus on the failures, with some of them even sharing that they do not categorize missed goals with failure. This element within the theoretical framework proved to be the least recurring theme, but also the one that shared the most commonalities among student stories.

Dependence

A fifth theme that appeared during the individual interviews was dependence. Schlossberg’s (1989) Marginality and Mattering theoretical framework defines dependence as one feeling that they are needed. Findings from these individual interviews shed light on both students and administrators experiencing the feeling of being needed. For students, the feeling being needed arose from interactions or reliance from their peers. In contrast, administrators tended to find a sense of being needed from the operational aspects of the campus recreation facility.

Madeline, a student participant in the research study, expressed a time that she used the campus recreation facility with a friend. Her account aligned well with the element of dependence. Specifically, her story demonstrated a reliance on others to achieve something or find satisfaction with a particular action:

“So it’s like kind of moments like that for when you’re feeling down in a way and you don’t want to work out by yourself, they [peers] would be like, oh, come on, let’s workout together, you don’t have to do it by yourself.”

Another student participant, Christina, shared that using the campus recreation facility with peers enhanced her experience using the facility:

“I would say it was definitely a motivation to know that, like, you know, I’m wanting someone to go to the gym with just because like it might make my time there more fun.”

Both remarks that were shared by student participants highlight that dependence correlates to an individual leaning on their peers for support. Students who worked out together proved to be more engaged and committed to maintaining their use of the facility. When they worked out consistently with someone else, it activated a feeling of being needed. They simply did not want to let their peers down by not being present, whether physically or mentally. In addition to students feeling that they were depended on by one another, they also felt a sense of being needed by the college. Two students, Bennett and Abby, shared stories about times that they wanted to help the campus recreation facility and staff out by helping to promote the campus recreation facility.

Bennett shared, “they allowed me to help out and promote the gym itself so we could have more people coming in just to see that it’s more convenient instead of somebody going to class and then they go to another gym which is like maybe 10 or 20 minutes away. You have the gym at the college right there.”

Abby shared, “...every time I would give tours, I would make sure to walk everybody all the way down the hallway to go look at the gym because I was so proud that we had that at our small school.”

Both Bennett and Abby's perspectives and experiences unveiled a fascinating insight to the element of dependence. Each student not only took pride in helping promote the campus recreation facility, but they also felt needed. They felt that they shared a responsibility to highlight the campus recreation facility as a resource to other students. This lens shows that the college and campus recreation staff relied on the students to assist in their efforts to increase the number of individuals who were engaging with the facility and those in it.

In the earlier accounts, students felt needed to help one another and the promotion of the campus recreation facility. Much like the responsibility that is felt by these student participants, administrators who participated in the study also felt that they were needed to provide access to students who wanted to use the facility and programs. Neal, an administrator who participated in the study, shared his perspective on the importance of the campus recreation facility having hours that reflected the times in which students were available to use the facility:

"We know that students that use it [the campus recreation facility] are looking to get back into the fitness center as soon as they can it's closed in between semesters."

Additionally, when asked to identify a challenge that he saw the campus recreation facility facing, he shared that accessibility due to hours of operation, along with staffing, pose a challenge:

"I mean, you know, there's also, as a community college, I mean, hours and staffing are always, I think, a bit of a concern."

Different from the way in which students undergo a feeling of being needed, it seems as if staff and administrators feel needed or depended on by ensuring that the campus recreation facility is up and running and serving students to the best of its ability. Feeling a sense of dependence contributes to the overall environment that the campus recreation facility presents to students and staff, alike. In alignment with its mission to enhance students' overall health, administrators have been intentional about developing an atmosphere where students come together and depend on each other by holding each other accountable and supporting one another. Along with students holding each other accountable, staff have a good understanding that the decisions that they make, regarding the logistics and offerings provided by

the campus recreation facility, have a direct impact on students, therefore granting them a sense of feeling needed.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this qualitative case study indicate that campus recreation facilities and programs at community colleges contribute greatly to students feeling connected to peers and administrators. While campus recreation involvement can enhance the student experience, it is essential that it fosters an environment that allows students to feel cared for, seen, appreciated, needed, and supported. Not only must campus recreation facilities possess these attributes, but they must also have a clear mission and commitment to helping shape the whole student.

Chapter V

Discussion & Implications

Higher education professionals have known for decades the impact that student involvement and engagement have on student success, both socially and academically. Recent research has shed light on the importance that student mattering has on a student's ability to get engaged and stay engaged at colleges and universities across the nation. While there has been research with a keen focus on student mattering, little to no research has been conducted to examine the role that campus recreation facilities and programs play on students feeling they matter at their respective institutions of higher education. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to better understand the impact that campus recreation facilities and programs had on student sense of mattering at a medium-sized community college in Virginia. This chapter presents an overview of the findings from the qualitative case study, while addressing the following research questions:

RQ1: How does involvement in campus recreation impact students' sense of mattering at community colleges?

RQ2: How do administrators think about campus recreation programs and their connection to student mattering?

These two research questions were answered through conducting 11 individual, semi-structured interviews with community college students and administrators from a medium-sized community college in Virginia. Each interview ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. This chapter will discuss results from the qualitative research, along with answers to each research question, how it aligns with previous literature, and recommendations for future research.

Research Question 1: Campus Recreation Facility Impact on Student Mattering

At the studied community college, campus recreation facilities proved to have a strong impact on students feeling that they mattered. By using Schlossberg's Marginality and Mattering (1989) framework, several themes emerged that contributed to students' sense of mattering. Among these themes,

importance, attention, appreciation, ego-extension, and dependence arose as primary themes supporting student mattering. These themes were seen primarily through environmental factors and relationships. The campus recreation facility has been designed to impact students in a way that makes them feel cared about. Campus recreation staff and college administrators, alike, expressed that they believed it was important to curate an environment that made students feel comfortable. With the institution's goals of committing and prioritizing health and wellness to its students, it was apparent that there was a great deal of intentionality to the physical space. Many student participants shed light on how the facility itself presented a welcoming feel, with many sharing that it led to them cancelling memberships at other gyms.

These findings align with Schlossberg's element of importance. Administrators demonstrate their intention to be strategic in making students feel cared about. Students feel that the environment they have as a resource is a place for them, regardless of background or differences. Both administrator and student perspectives align with research that concludes that physical spaces have emotional impacts on students and their overall experiences in specific places across their college campuses (Mulrooney & Kelly, 2020).

Additionally, students also expressed that the environment contributed to them feeling needed. Several student participants highlighted how the environment promoted celebrating the success of each other, sharing that being in a space that encouraged camaraderie was something that made them feel that they were relied on by peers. Throughout the interview process, students elaborated on the exciting culture the campus recreation facility fostered for individuals using the space. Some students expressed that the environment was one in which they felt they were depended on, therefore supporting prior research that states physical spaces can play a pivotal role on students' involvement with the space itself and those in it (Strange & Banning, 2015). This dependence highlights somewhat of a culture of teamwork or partnership between students and staff. It also supports Makubuya, et al's 2020 study that indicates that environments can assist in providing individuals with certain behavioral norms.

Along with campus recreation space playing a prominent role in students feeling that they mattered, relationships emerged as a strong theme. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954) identifies that it is essential for individuals to feel connected to one another or groups of people. Throughout this

qualitative case study, students revealed that their feelings of mattering when participating in campus recreation were due in part to the relationships they developed with peers and campus recreation staff members. Most students who participated in the study shed light on their campus recreation participation leading to the development of relationships with others who either were like-minded or shared similar goals to establish and maintain a healthy lifestyle. For several students, the relationships they were able to build with peers and campus recreation staff members proved to be instrumental in their feeling that they mattered. In accordance with one research study, “the relationship between new student friendships and feeling connected to a larger student body helps elucidate the belonging to groups and being active in campus life are positive indicators of student success” (Farrell, et al., 2018).

Additionally, student participants also highlighted that participating in campus recreation was something that made them feel a sense of mattering, due to a common knowledge that it was a resource that was used by peers. Eubank and Devita (2023) identified that student belonging increased based on relationship building with peers. Students throughout the study revealed that some of their greatest friendships were fostered through using the campus recreation facility, some even sharing that the more frequent exposure they had to peers the more they found connection points. Another important element of this qualitative case study that was uncovered was an appreciation for diverse groups of students to grow relationships with others that they may not typically have opportunities to do so with. Administrators from the study identified this occurrence as being a contributing factor to student sense of mattering.

Several accounts from participants in my study support the idea that students can strengthen their feelings of mattering through experiencing connections with those who are different than them. Students can develop a better understanding of themselves through these interactions with others (Patterson & Dowart, 2019; Soria, et al., 2022).

Research Question #2: Administrators’ Perspective of Student Mattering

Administrators who participated in this study were also asked a series of semi-structured interview questions. Some of these questions aimed to gain a better outlook of the perspectives of administrators at the institution. These perspectives varied based on the level of interaction they had with

students. The most promising perspective that was gained was from the campus recreation employee, Larry, who serves in a more student-facing role at the college. During the interview with Larry there was a common theme related to student mattering that surfaced. The physical space was once again something that arose as a reference point for student mattering. Larry shared that the intention behind how he designed the campus recreation facility was to increase the number of students who participated in exercise. Findings showed that this proved to be successful, seeing that many students either became routine users of the space or even cancelled other gym memberships, due to the convenience and quality of the campus recreation facility at the institution.

It was apparent throughout the interviews that administrators wanted to develop a campus recreation environment that was welcoming, while also being flexible in the way it could be used. It could be seen that a culture of appreciating one's efforts is something that the campus recreation facility has done well. When described, the campus recreation facility has consisted of a space for those interested in weight-training, as well as a space for those who are looking for more cardio, yoga, etc. types of exercises. This proved to be effective in enhancing student mattering because students who had different interests all highlighted how they use the facility and how it has helped them develop relationships with individuals who either have similar interests or who they may not have interacted with, otherwise.

Additionally, campus recreation and college administrators felt that the campus recreation facility actively contributed to student mattering through programs or resources it offered. Neal, a college administrator, shared that health and wellness was something the college was committed to in their mission for the development of the whole student. Throughout the study, the conversation around current internal programs was not brought up. However, through interviews with these administrators, they did highlight how the current state of the campus recreation facility and its operation was encouraging for future efforts they intend to implement in the upcoming academic year. One administrative participant, Karen, shared her plans of incorporating club sports into the programming of campus recreation. She also mentioned results of piloting a campus soccer team on campus, sharing that the development of a team sport allowed students to feel cared about and depended on.

Recommendations for Practice

This study aimed to develop a better understanding of the impact that campus recreation facilities have on community college students' sense of mattering. Schlossberg's Theory (1989) proved to be vital in analyzing the data from my qualitative case study. Supported by this theory, my findings unveiled that community college students felt they mattered, whether that be to their peers, staff, or the institution itself. This was seen through the focus of importance, attention, appreciation, ego-extension, and dependence. The recommendations to follow were developed using the findings of my study, along with best practices from the literature.

Recommendation One: Foster an Inclusive Campus Recreation Environment

Students who participated in the qualitative case study stressed the importance the campus recreation facility environment had on their sense of mattering. With approximately one-third of undergraduate students attending community colleges (Community College Research Center, 2023), it is vital that student affairs professionals establish student-focused environments that are welcoming. Much like the campus recreation facility at the studied institution, other community colleges should strive to meet students where they are. The more opportunities students have to engage in wellness, the higher their quality of life will be (Ellis, et al., 2002). Not only do these types of environments contribute to more engagement by students, but it also lends to enhancing their sense of mattering through ego-extension. Some students in the study shared a slight hesitation to attend or use the campus recreation facility, initially, due to the assumption that it was designed for a specific type of student.

However, after engaging and making it a habit, many of the same students developed confidence. Schlossberg (1989) describes ego-extension as one feeling they matter through others being proud of their efforts. In an everchanging arena of higher education, students can benefit from increased levels of confidence and feeling good about themselves. Additionally, it is important for institutions that do not have campus recreation facilities to strongly consider implementing them. Much like the offerings provided through student engagement offices or clubs and organizations, campus recreation facilities

serve as environments where students can engage with individuals who are both like-minded to them, and those who are different than themselves. Schlossberg's Theory (1989) concludes that the element of attention is important to mattering, due to students feeling that they are noticed by others. This recommendation is intended to enhance the effectiveness of campus recreation facilities as they aim to be more inclusive in their efforts. Another way this recommendation may impact student affairs professionals and administrators is through developing more intentional ways to engage with students.

Recommendation Two: Establish Intentional Processes to Connect with Students

A prominent finding from this qualitative case study was the way in which connections with campus recreation staff members contributed to students' sense of mattering, both through the lens of importance and attention. Several students highlighted the efforts of campus recreation staff members to reach out to them during pivotal times in their lives. Ranging from not seeing a student for a few days or being aware of life occurrences, such as surgeries, campus recreation staff demonstrated an intentional effort to having meaningful connections with student participants. This is something that both campus recreation staff and other faculty and staff members at institutions of higher education could benefit from. In some instances, students shared that the outreach by campus recreation staff led to their decision to continuing to use the space and build other connections at the college. Prior research concludes that developing meaningful connections with faculty or staff members can have a positive impact on students and their ability to succeed (Bourdieu, 1985).

Throughout the three individual interviews with administrators, none of them highlighted any information on formal training processes for campus recreation staff members. Implementing a formal training program for campus recreation staff could prove to be effective in developing connections with students. Trainings could focus on welcoming individuals to the facility when they arrive, interacting and assisting with workouts, along with thanking them for coming to use the facility. This approach would help establish rapport in a more authentic manner. In addition to building rapport with students who become involved in campus recreation, campus recreation staff can also use these interactions to inform

students about the resources they offer. A portion of the campus recreation training program could be empowering staff to develop new and exciting programs.

Recommendation Three: Develop Diverse Catalog of Activities

This qualitative case study discovered that the studied campus recreation facility is doing a lot of wonderful things. However, one area for improvement that could extend to other institutions as a best practice is the development of diverse activities. All student participants of my research study placed an emphasis on using the campus recreation facility to primarily lift weights. While most campus recreation facilities or gyms have a weight-training focus, it is important that such spaces have other activities or offerings for their participants.

An interesting aspect of this research study was that none of the 11 interviewees shed light on the programs offered by the campus recreation facility. As literature has shown, students who have opportunities to engage in more structured activities are more likely to develop a stronger sense of mattering and connection with others (Lower-Hoppe, et al., 2020). The options for more structured activities can be exhaustive, seeing that many institutions of higher education may have resources to support certain programs or activities. For instance, the studied community college owned outdoor spaces that include a basketball court, tennis and pickleball courts, along with an extensive eight-hole disc golf course. Not only was it interesting to not hear students or administrators highlight these activities as contributing to their campus recreation experience, but I learned through an interview with one administrator that these activities are housed under the Student Engagement and Student Life office.

In most institutions of higher education, campus recreation and student engagement are categorized under the same office or unit. With the offerings that the campus recreation facility currently has, a part of the recommendation to expand and diversify their activities is to merge the campus recreation facility with the Student Engagement and Student Life office. These two units would help increase the reach that the institution would have on students and their involvement. With the Student Engagement and Student Life office facilitating activities like club sports, it would be beneficial to connect that to the campus recreation facility, especially seeing that this is a best practice used by many

colleges and universities, nationwide. This shift in organizational structure could enhance their efforts and resources made by the personnel in those positions, along with providing more intentional opportunities for programming that promotes health and wellness for the entire college community, including students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

Recommendation Four: Intentional Programming Geared Towards Student, Faculty, and Staff Connections

Within most of my individual interviews with students and some administrators, the importance of relationships consistently surfaced. As mentioned in recommendation two, research has identified that relationships with faculty and staff can enhance students' feelings of mattering and connection. Many colleges and universities have found great success through a host of programs geared toward the entire campus community. Some examples of programs that may be beneficial to community colleges include intramural leagues, outdoor trips, and group classes.

Much like club sports, intramural sports prove to be an effective way to get larger groups of individuals involved in campus recreation programming. Intramural sports also provide students with opportunities to encourage their favorite faculty or staff member to join their team or to develop an opposing team. Some institutions are successful in developing faculty/staff vs. student tournaments for their campus communities to participate in.

Another great program that would be beneficial for the community college to consider is outdoor programs. Outdoor programs serve as an effective and inclusive way to get a diverse group of students engaged with the campus recreation facility, faculty, and staff members. Colleges and universities across the nation have partnered with their student affairs divisions to implement service-learning opportunities for faculty and students to engage in, ranging from service opportunities to team building and leadership exercises.

Given that the studied institution has done a great job of developing multifunctional space in their campus recreation facility, a great program to offer would be group classes. As was discovered in my findings, along with previous literature, students appreciated when they had others to exercise with

(Eubank & DeVita, 2023). Group classes can also be an inclusive and low-stakes way to get students into the campus recreation facility. A benefit to the development of many of these programs, such as group classes, is that it provides additional options for students, as well as encourages faculty and staff to utilize the facility as a resource that is free, rather than pay for an off-campus gym membership. Each of these suggested programs also can be facilitated by faculty and staff, which ultimately leads to students establishing relationships with them in a different capacity.

Recommendation Five: Establishing Alignment with College Values

According to their strategic plan, the studied community college is committed to helping students strengthen their communities, both academically and socially. However, throughout the individual interviews conducted with administrators, there was no acknowledgement of campus recreation being aligned with the greater values, which were access, completion, and community engagement. It is vital that administrators can convey how student involvement in campus recreation programs will advance their strategic goals. Specifically, participation in campus recreation has been shown to have positive impacts on community engagement, therefore the institution must strongly consider ways in which they can align campus recreation programming with co-curricular opportunities.

Additionally, the institution should develop a mission and vision statement for the campus recreation facility. Given that the institution has developed a strategic plan, they are in a unique position to not only develop mission and visions for their campus recreation and student engagement areas, but they can do so in a way that allows them to incorporate some methods for measuring their efforts with the strategic plan's objectives. This recommendation will help administrators fine tune the direction in which the campus recreation facility is going in, along with what programming and initiatives may assist them in accomplishing some of their strategic goals.

Another area that can benefit the institution regarding alignment with their strategic plan is ensuring that students feel welcome and included. The second tier of their strategic plan focuses on the fostering an inclusive environment. This is another area that students expressed being important to their experience engaging with campus recreation, however, none of the administrative participants shed light

on this during their individual interviews. This is important, especially when aiming to recruit, retain, and graduate a diverse group of individuals. While this qualitative case study provided more insight into the impact that involvement in campus recreation had on student sense of mattering in community colleges, there were some outcomes and limitations that must be highlighted.

Discussion & Limitations

This qualitative case study placed an emphasis on examining the impact that campus recreation facilities had on students' sense of mattering at community colleges. While the findings indicated that there is a positive correlation between campus recreation facilities and students' sense of mattering at the studied community college, there are some limitations that are important to note. These limitations include, but are not limited to, participant demographics, data collection methods, and generalizability.

In conducting this qualitative case study at a medium-sized community college in Virginia, a convenience sample was used to gather study participants. A convenience sample allowed for any interested student to participate in the research study, which did not take into consideration race, ethnicity, age, etc. Given the literature around race and age being prominent factors in students being successful in their academic pursuits at community college (Dembicki, 2023), this would have been essential to better understanding if there are significant impacts that these demographics play on students' sense of mattering through participation in campus recreation at respective community colleges. Specifically, literature has concluded that Hispanic and African American students are successful at a lower rate than their white peers (Dembicki, 2023). Similarly, literature around age has shown that traditional-aged students tend to succeed at a higher rate than their older peers (Gammon & Chambers, 2023). Seeing that race and age were not collected or emphasized in this study, it serves as a limitation to the greater research around community college student engagement and success. In addition to race and age not being collected in this study, the process to get student participants was limiting. Due to policies at the studied community college, I was unable to solicit student participation in a direct way, nor could employees of the institution do so. Given that solicitation could not be made in a face-to-face way, I had

to rely on student interest in participating using flyers. This posed a challenge to get students interested in participating, which ultimately delayed conducting research for over a month.

Along with the institution's policy regarding solicitation, my research was limited to conducting semi-structured, individual interviews virtually. Creswell (2018) states that in-person interviews prove to be more effective, due to the researcher's ability to develop a more in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, heightening the importance and effectiveness of non-verbal cues. Another limitation that came with virtual interviews was choosing Zoom as the platform to video and record my interviews. While Zoom proves to be effective for daily work meetings, it proved to not be as effective with individual interviews with students, as some interviews were disrupted by poor connection, participants' environments not being quiet, or simply interviewees not turning their cameras on, therefore eliminating the ability to gauge physical cues.

The last limitation worth noting is that the research conducted is not generalizable for future researchers. Seeing that this research was conducted at a medium-sized community college with a small, convenience sample of participants, the perspectives and experiences of the participants are not representative of the greater population found at the community college. With community colleges being very diverse institutions of higher education, it is important to note that the findings of this research study do not account for the varying groups of students found on community college campuses. More importantly, my qualitative case study is limited only to students who used the campus recreation facility. Students who did not use the facility were not studied, therefore limiting the collected data to only the experiences of those who use the facility and its offerings.

Although this qualitative case study had several limitations, it does lead to recommendations for future research to be conducted on student mattering as it pertains to community college students and their participation in campus recreation facilities. Three primary recommendations that I have for future researchers in this area are to consider employing a quantitative research study across several community colleges, developing more in-depth criteria for student participants, and examine if there is any

significance between campus recreation contributing to mattering and how it may influence student retention.

The advantages that future researchers may gain from conducting this research study as a quantitative study is the volume of data that they would have to work with. Unlike the eight student participants in my study, a quantitative study could include a sample of students from numerous community colleges and could be conducted using surveys that use Likert scales. Much like my qualitative case study, a quantitative research study could use Schlossberg's Marginality and Mattering (1989) framework to develop intentional questions that students could indicate to what extent they align with their personal experiences.

Secondly, a quantitative research study would also allow for demographic data to be more easily obtained. This would benefit the researcher in better understanding how mattering exists among different groups of students, including race, ethnicity, and age. Identifying specific demographic information would also allow the researcher to have more flexibility in setting the criteria for participants. Having the ability to collect varying aspects of the data would provide the researcher with more substance to aggregate the findings in a way that makes the study both more reliable and generalizable.

Lastly, a final recommendation for future researchers conducting studies around mattering and/or campus recreation impacts, is to place an emphasis on whether campus recreation participation plays a role in student retention at community colleges. Another benefit of this recommendation for college administrators and student affairs professionals is the effect it will have on student retention.

With retention among community college students being lower than that of their four-year peers, community colleges are keen on finding ways to better retain students. Literature shows that students who actively participate in their campus recreation facility retain at a higher rate than their peers who do not use the facilities (Forrester, et al., 2018). When students feel more connected or a higher sense of mattering at their institution, they are more likely to develop an attachment to the institution, therefore leading to a deeper commitment to retaining. Based on the findings of my qualitative case study, it is concluded that the campus recreation facility at a medium-sized community college in Virginia had a

positive and strong impact on students' sense of mattering. However, there were no elements of my study that focused on tracking if the contributions of the campus recreation facility had any direct reflection on students staying enrolled at the institution or graduating within the average amount of time, both to the standards of the institution and that reflected in national statistics.

Summary

This qualitative case study was intended to examine the impact that campus recreation facilities have on community college students' sense of mattering. With little-to-no research conducted on mattering at community colleges, this study was extremely important to contributing to both better understanding the experiences of community college students, and gaining insight into the role that campus recreation facilities play in the community college setting. Additionally, this research was not only important but unique in that it aimed to use a theoretical framework focused on student mattering to establish what elements of the community college student experience were prominent in providing students with a sense of mattering.

Through using Schlossberg's Theory of Marginality and Mattering (1989), I was able to conduct my research through semi-structured interviews with eight community college students and three college administrators. This research design allowed me to capture the voices and perspectives of the participants, which was important to the success of my study. Using the five components found in the theoretical framework also allowed me to develop my interview protocol with questions that aligned with different aspect of mattering.

The findings of this study can prove to be vital to student affairs professionals and college administrators. Specifically, findings indicated the importance and role that campus recreation facilities play on community college students' sense of mattering. Not only will the results of this research assist in finding innovative ways to implement best practices for fostering mattering among students, but it will also assist in advocating for campus recreation facilities to be a strong consideration for community college systems across the nation. This study accompanies prior research in the realm of mattering,

belonging, and health and wellness, all of which contribute to the greater hope of enhancing the college student experience.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol – Student Participants

Introduction

You have been selected to participate in this qualitative research study because you have shown an interest in the research, as well as meet the criterion of using campus recreation facilities at least once per-week. My research study focuses on the impact that campus recreation facilities and programs have on community college students' sense of mattering, with a specific focus on the perspectives and experiences of students. This study aims to gain a better understanding of the student experience using the campus recreation program, as well as outcomes that are a result of your engagement with campus recreation. I will ask you a series of open-ended questions. Please be as detailed as possible in your responses, as it will assist in addressing the research questions of this study. As I transcribe our interview, I will replace your name with a pseudonym, which will allow your name and information to be anonymous throughout this study. If at any point you have questions or concerns, you may contact me.

Interviewee Background

1. What is your name?
2. How long have you been a student at this institution?
3. What is your field of study?

Campus Recreation Involvement

1. Why do you participate in campus recreation? How does participating make you feel?
2. What campus recreation activities do you enjoy most? What about those activities do you enjoy? When you are doing that activity, how does it make you feel?
3. Tell me about a time you achieved a goal. How did it make you feel?
 - a. Did you tell anyone? How did their reaction make you feel?
4. In thinking about the space, how do you feel when you walk into the campus recreation facility?
5. Tell me about a time you were given the opportunity to share your thoughts or ideas on campus recreation programs or initiatives. How did that opportunity make you feel?

I want to talk about people you encounter when using the facility.

6. What role do these people play in your life?
7. Tell me about some ways you feel supported by campus recreation staff when participating in the facility or programs? What are some ways that you feel supported by peers? Administrators?
8. Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about or that we haven't talked about that you would like to share?

[Participant], I would like to thank you for taking the time today to share more about your experience and thoughts on campus recreation at the College. Over the next few days, I will begin transcribing our

interview and finding themes. During this time, I may develop additional questions, which means I will contact you with a request to do a follow-up interview. After transcribing and discovering themes, I will notify you of the progress and next steps that I will take. Once again, as I transcribe our interview, I will replace your name with a pseudonym, which will allow your name and information to be anonymous throughout this study. If at any point you have questions or concerns, you may contact me. Thank you for your time and insight and I will be in contact soon.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol – Administrators & Staff

Introduction

You have been selected to participate in this qualitative research study because your role at the institution is involved with the development and operations of campus recreation programs at the college. My research study focuses on the impact that campus recreation facilities and programs have on community college students' sense of belonging or connectedness, with a specific focus on the perspectives and experiences of students. The individual interview that I will conduct with you will be focused on your perspective of the campus recreation facility and programs, along with how it impacts students' sense of belonging or connectedness from your perspective. This interview will also aim to shed light on the strategic approach to campus recreation and focus on the effectiveness of campus recreation at community colleges. This study aims to gain a better understanding of how campus recreation can be/is used to enhance student belonging and connectedness and student engagement. I will ask you a series of open-ended questions. Please be as detailed as possible in your responses, as it will assist in addressing the research questions of this study. As I transcribe our interview, I will replace your name with a pseudonym, which will allow your name and information to be anonymous throughout this study. If at any point you have questions or concerns, you may contact me.

Interviewee Background

1. What is your name?
2. What is your role at this institution?
3. How long have you been in this role at this institution?
4. Briefly describe your role as it relates to campus recreation and student belonging and connectedness.

Campus Recreation Involvement



1. Tell me about the process in which fitness center staff members are trained to engage with students in the campus recreation facility and/or in programs?
2. What steps do you take when you notice a student hasn't shown up to the campus recreation facility in a few days?
3. In thinking about the student experience, how do you think participating in campus recreation makes students feel about themselves? Their peers?
4. Can you share ways in which staff and faculty promote campus recreation at the college?
5. In thinking about space, what feelings do you think students have when they walk into the campus recreation facility? How do you want students to feel as they leave the campus recreation facility?

6. What do you believe the benefits of participating in campus recreation are for students?
7. What are some challenges you believe students face when participating in campus recreation? How do you think these challenges influence their decisions to participate in future campus recreation activities?
8. Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about or that we haven't talked about that you would like to share?

[Participant], I would like to thank you for taking the time today to share more about your experience and thoughts on campus recreation at the College. Over the next few days, I will begin transcribing our interview and finding themes. During this time, I may develop additional questions, which means I will contact you with a request to do a follow-up interview. After transcribing and discovering themes, I will notify you of the progress and next steps that I will take. Once again, as I transcribe our interview, I will replace your name with a pseudonym, which will allow your name and information to be anonymous throughout this study. If at any point you have questions or concerns, you may contact me. Thank you for your time and insight and I will be in contact soon.




Appendix C

ARE YOU A STUDENT MEMBER OF THE PVCC FITNESS CENTER?



REGISTER TODAY TO PARTICIPATE IN A UVA RESEARCH STUDY

Participants will receive a \$15 Visa gift card



Participation Requirements

- The student must be 18 years of age or older
- The student must be a full-time student at Piedmont Virginia Community College
- The student must participate in the use of the campus recreation facility or programs at least once per week
- The student must have completed at least one semester at Piedmont Virginia Community College

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