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## Effects of College Physical Activity Instructors' Enthusiasm on Student Experiences in Class

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1 **Abstract**

2 It is hoped that teachers in all content areas will be excited, or enthusiastic for what they  
3 will be teaching their students. A teacher’s enthusiasm in class can be beneficial to students  
4 (Locke & Woods, 1982). Teacher enthusiasm also applies in college physical activity classes.  
5 This study investigated college physical activity instructor’s perception and opinions their  
6 enthusiasm and how it may affect the student’s experiences in class. For this study 10 college  
7 physical activity instructors were surveyed. Generally, the college physical activity felt that  
8 when they initiate conversations with students, listen to students, and are excited about what they  
9 are teaching show to students that they are enthusiastic instructors.

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23           Effective teachers/instructors exhibit a multitude of behaviors and characteristics when  
24 teaching and interacting with students. One characteristic teachers/instructors can exhibit is  
25 being enthusiastic. It doesn't matter the content being taught the teacher/instructor teaches,  
26 enthusiasm can be shown to their students. As important as a teacher/instructor enthusiasm is to  
27 encourage a student to learn, Patrick, et. al. (2000) has stated that a student is responsible for  
28 their learning. If the student relies on the teacher/instructor to motivate or entertain them to  
29 learn, the student is falling short in their education. To secure a definition for teacher enthusiasm  
30 Rolider, et. al. (1984) said that there are many different vague definitions for teacher enthusiasm.  
31 Yet, Caruso (1982) said that there are descriptors to illustrate an enthusiast teacher, for example,  
32 "exciting", "dynamic", "stimulating", "smiling", "joking", and "gestures."

33           These descriptors can be used to describe a college professors/instructor. In the general  
34 education literature Patrick, et., al. (2000) investigated if enthusiastic teachers affected students'  
35 intrinsic motivation to learn about materials from their class. It was concluded that when a  
36 teacher exhibits enthusiasm, students are more likely to be interested, energetic, curious, and  
37 excited about learning. The researchers continued by stating, a teachers' enthusiasm is no  
38 substitute for a student's own motivation to learn. The student has to do their part by being  
39 vested in what is being taught and put forth the effort to learn. The literature in the physical  
40 education (PE) context is limited in regard to teacher enthusiasm. Yet, Carlisle and Phillips  
41 (1984) studied the relationship between teacher enthusiasm and a selected group of teacher and  
42 student behaviors in a controlled PE context. The researchers concluded that teachers who are  
43 more enthused provide more instruction time than their less enthused peers. It was also noted  
44 that the more enthused PE teachers provides more positive feedback to their students. From the  
45 practitioner PE literature Mitchell (2013) presents the concept of modeling enthusiasm for the

46 class activities and the PE presentation of what the students will be participating in, in front of  
47 them. This sends a positive message to the students that what they are participating in is  
48 important for the students to learn. The literature pertaining to college physical activity (PA)  
49 instructors' enthusiasm is also limited. Yet, Barney and Leavitt (2019) studied the effects of  
50 college physical activity (PA) instructors use of appropriate instructional practices (AIP) in their  
51 PA classes and its effects on the learning environment. One of the findings from this study was  
52 the PA instructor being positive, thus positively affecting the learning environment. It was felt  
53 that when the instructor was positive toward students, the students felt their instructor was  
54 enthusiastic. Student statements regarding this point was, "This instructor is upbeat", and "The  
55 instructor is passionate about what she teaches. I love it." Along the lives of AIP, The Society of  
56 Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE) has created a document titled *Appropriate Instructional*  
57 *Practice Guidelines for Higher Education Physical Activity Programs* (2022). This document is  
58 to assist college PA instructors with the teaching. The document "identifies practices that  
59 maximize opportunities for learning, participation, and success for all students" (2022, p. 5).  
60 Specific pedagogical practices are presented to assist in student learning. One specific  
61 instructional practice is offered dealing with the instructor demonstrating enthusiasm. It states,  
62 "Faculty demonstrates enthusiasm for an active, healthy lifestyle (e.g., model enjoyment of an  
63 activity, often participate in activity before, during, and after class, promote healthy eating,  
64 encourage adequate sleep and stress reduction)" (SHAPE, 2022, p. 25) An example of an  
65 inappropriate instructional practice regarding enthusiasm is "Faculty appear to dislike or not  
66 enjoy the physical activity (e.g., instruct from a chair or the bleachers, or focus attention on other  
67 tasks, such as written work). These types of statements in the document point to the importance  
68 a PA instructors' enthusiasm can be upon the college student. Thus, because of the paucity of

69 research dealing with college PA instructors' enthusiasm, the purpose of this study was to explore  
70 the college PA instructors' enthusiasm on the college students experience in their PA class.

## 71 **Methods**

### 72 **Participants**

73 The participants for this study included 53 college-aged students (26 males & 27 females)  
74 from a private university in the intermountain west in the United States. The participants were  
75 enrolled in racquetball, running, and tennis classes.

### 76 **Instrumentation**

77 An instrument could not be identified from previous research Through a review of the  
78 literature, open-ended survey questions with a stem of "When my SWELL instructor...", were  
79 created dealing specifically with teacher enthusiasm. The survey questions consisted of nine  
80 open-ended questions regarding the participants to write their responses to the question. There  
81 were two demographic questions on the survey. To establish content validity, college-aged  
82 students not participating in this study read through the survey questions. Open-ended questions  
83 were reviewed for clarity and understanding. For reliability, the survey was pilot-tested on  
84 college-aged students not involved in this study.

### 85 **Procedures**

86 Upon Institutional Review Board (IRB) and university PA administrator approval,  
87 convenience sampling was employed for data collecting for this study the researchers contacted  
88 three PA instructors, explaining the study and the survey question the participants would be  
89 answering. The three PA classes used for this study was racquetball, running, and tennis classes.  
90 Participation of students agreeing to take the survey was 98%. The participants were assured  
91 that their participation in the study would not affect their grade in their PA class or their class

92 standing. After securing student consent, the researchers explained to the students the method  
93 for taking the survey. The researchers created a QR code the students could take a picture of the  
94 code that would lead the student to the survey, allowing them to answer the survey questions.  
95 After the researchers explained the method of taking the survey. The students retrieved their  
96 phones, took a picture of the QR code, and completed the survey. At a later time, the researchers  
97 were able to retrieve the student comments from the survey.

## 98 **Data Analysis**

99 For this analysis of the survey questions, participant responses were correlated and  
100 reviewed, and preliminary coding categories were generated, with framework analysis  
101 methodology for participants responses, as outlined by Check and Schutt (2011). Framework  
102 analysis incorporated the stages of (1) familiarization, (2) thematic, (3) identification, and (4)  
103 Charting and interpretation (Rabiee, 2004).

## 104 **Enthusiastic Behaviors of PA Instructors**

105 From the analyzed data the researchers identified the following themes of enthusiastic  
106 behaviors of PA instructors. They were: (1) Initiates conversations with students, (2) Listens to  
107 the students, and (3) Appears excited regarding the instructor's content teach.

## 108 **Results**

### 109 **Initiates Conversations with Students**

110 For many of the students they felt that when the PA instructor would initiate  
111 conversations with the PA instructor, they were being enthusiastic. One student commented, "I  
112 enjoy it [conversations] and it makes me feel like they care about their students." A second  
113 student stated, "This one [conversations with students] is important, especially when they know  
114 my name! It shows they care." Another student shared that, "I love this, I think it is very

115 beneficial to treat each other as individuals and learn more about each other. It helps people feel  
116 seen.”

### 117 **Listens to Students**

118 A second theme from the data was the PA instructor listens to the student. A student said,  
119 “It feels like I could ask any question and not feel stupid about the question I have.” A second  
120 student explained, “Answers even though he’s said it multiple times.” One final student  
121 commented, “He does a great job and responds to all of my emails quickly!” Throughout many  
122 of the student’s comments, there was one word used in student response and that word was  
123 important. Such comments were, “This is so important”, “Super important”, and “very, very  
124 important.”

### 125 **Appears Excited about Content the PA Instructor Teaches**

126 The third and final theme was the PA investigator is excited about the content the teach.  
127 One student shared, “If they are not enthusiastic about what they are teaching the students won’t  
128 be keen to listen. I appreciate it when my instructor shows some enthusiasm about what they are  
129 teaching.” A second student commented, “He uses big are movements and increases in volume  
130 as he teaches. I like this. It shows they enjoy what they are doing.” A final student stated, “I  
131 have noticed with myself that when my instructor is enthusiastic during class, I am more engaged  
132 in the activities.” One last result from the student responses, was the phrase of “my enthusiasm”  
133 was positively affected by their PA instructor. Some of the student responses were, “Improves  
134 my enthusiasm a lot”, “Ups my enthusiasm”, and “Makes a big difference in my enthusiasm.”

### 135 **Discussion**

136 The purpose of this study was to explore the college PA instructors’ enthusiasm on the  
137 college students experience in their PA class. From the results of this study, college students

138 were able to recognize their PA instructor enthusiasm in their classes positively affecting their  
139 experience in their PA class. From the first theme of the PA instructors initiating conversations  
140 with the students. It was generally felt that this was a positive and energetic example of their PA  
141 instructor being enthusiastic. Barney and Leavitt (2019) studied the effects of college PA  
142 instructors using appropriate instructional practice on the learning environment in a college PA  
143 program. One of the findings was the PA instructors' interactions with their students. Participant  
144 comments regarding their interactions with their PA instructor was, "This instructor is upbeat",  
145 "My instructor is personable, and I appreciate that." The student statements from this study  
146 were, "Shows they [instructors] care about our learning and are a fun and engaged person", "This  
147 is a positive experience for me, it makes me want to come to class." These results from this  
148 study along with previous research show the PA instructors interactions to be an important  
149 indicator of a PA instructors' enthusiasm. Many of the college students interpreted this behavior  
150 to be an outward showing of care towards their students. In turn the student's appreciated this  
151 from their PA instructors.

152 A second theme from this study was a PA instructors' enthusiasm was that they listened to  
153 their students. Generally, from this study, students dealt with the PA instructor listening to them  
154 when they had a question regarding them performing a skill in class. From the literature there is  
155 research that suggests that K-12 PE teachers should listen to the students in regard to activities  
156 students participate in class. Scantling, et. al. (1995) studied why high school students do not  
157 take elective PE courses. One of the findings from this study was that high school students don't  
158 enroll in elective PE is because they participate in the same games and activities over-and-over  
159 again every year. The researchers suggest that PE teachers need to listen to their students and  
160 consider what they have to say regarding the games and activities they participate in. From the



161 current study, the college students appreciated when their PA instructor would listen to them.  
162 The tone of the college student's responses wasn't as much concerning the games and activities,  
163 but dealing with a question they had regarding the learning of a skill. For example, it was stated,  
164 "I feel appreciated. I also feel heard and understood", "It feels like I could ask my question and  
165 not feel stupid about it", and "Answers even though he's said it multiple times." From the  
166 student survey responses, they appreciated when their instructor took the time to listen to them.  
167 This is an indication that the PA instructor cares for their students. Listening may not be a visible  
168 behavior of being enthusiastic, yet the students interpreted this to be an enthusiastic behavior of  
169 their PA instruction. Many of the students used the word 'important' and 'impactful' when their  
170 PA instructor listened to them. The third and final theme was the PA instructor was excited about  
171 the content they teach. Breault (2013) studied pre-service teacher's notions of what makes an  
172 effective high school teacher. The responses of the students were many. Yet, one of the students  
173 stated, "I do not believe it is possible for a teacher to fake enthusiasm...at least not for very long.  
174 They are going to see their students day in and day out for years; eventually their cover will be  
175 blown." From this study data, student's statements were, "I can feel that she really does love  
176 what she is teaching and wants us to know that too", "Show he is passionate about the subject  
177 and cares about our learning", and "He is enthusiastic about what he is teaching. He doesn't go  
178 overboard."

### 179 **Implications of the Study**

180 Enthusiastic behaviors exhibited by the PA instructor has the potential to positively  
181 impact the student and their experience in the class (Mitchell, 2013). The AIP document for  
182 activity programs in higher education reinforces the impact an enthusiastic PA instructor can be  
183 on students, which states, "Faculty demonstrates enthusiasm for an active healthy lifestyle (e.g.,

184 model enjoyment of an activity, often participate in activity, often participate in activity before,  
185 during, and after class, promote healthy eating, encourage adequate sleep, and stress reduction)  
186 (SHAPE, 2022, p. 25). From this study many of the students stated that their PA instructors’  
187 enthusiasm positively affected their own enthusiasm and experience in the class. Hopefully,  
188 leading the students to a physically active lifestyle. These results from this study can be  
189 beneficial for college PA instructors and college PA administrators, using the findings in the  
190 preparation and training of PA instructors.

### 191 **Limitations**

192 The researcher have noted limitations to this study. First, the PA instructors came from  
193 one university, which may not allow for a representative sampling of participants from other  
194 colleges and universities. A second limitation was the study conducted at a private university,  
195 which may further limit the generalizability for the findings. Thus, the conclusions and  
196 implications are mostly applicable to those participant’s demographics. Further research with  
197 broader demographics would provide a richer data set to ascertain the generalizability of the  
198 conclusions and implications found in this study.

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