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Using a University Health and Physical Education Majors Club to Recruit Preservice Teachers

By Craig Parkes and Shelley L. Holden
Physical education teacher education (PETE) literature suggests the profession is currently experiencing interrelated areas for concern. First, there is a significant decline in the number of recruits entering PETE programs nationwide (SHAPE America – Society for Health and Physical Educators & National Association for Kinesiology in Higher Education [NAKHE] Joint Task Force, 2018). Second, PETE programs are at risk of elimination due to low enrollments (Parkes & Weimer, in press). Recent efforts to address enrollment issues have focused on developing purposeful strategies to both recruit and retain prospective physical educators, including developing future physical educator clubs in high schools, recruiting nontraditional students, and exposing students to professional development opportunities (Richards & Templin, 2019). These proactive approaches to recruitment are of increased value during the current climate because recruitment efforts in PETE have a history of being somewhat informal and passive (Bulger, Jones, Taliaferro, & Wayda, 2015).

Reduced enrollments coupled with the elimination of PETE programs could lead to reductions in the number of qualified and certified teachers, whereby there are not enough certified teachers to meet the societal demand. States may begin to explore alternative licensure options, resulting in unqualified or poorly prepared teachers supervising less-sons (SHAPE America – Society for Health and Physical Educators & NAKHE Joint Task Force, 2018). There has been much discussion recently regarding the recruitment responsibilities of PETE faculty (Ayers & Woods, 2019). We are advocating that PETE faculty can take a more active role in the development and implementation of student “external recruitment” and “internal retention” strategies to improve enrollment numbers and maintain high professional standards for their graduates. This article is part one of a two-part series highlighting how a health and physical education (HPE) majors club is being used to enhance PETE recruitment and retention at the University of South Alabama.

**Majors Club Purpose**

The majors club idea came from discussions between HPE faculty members and currently enrolled students. Several faculty members had been involved in similar clubs at prior institutions and highlighted the advantages of students running this professional organization. The minimum number of 10 students were recruited, and they collaborated with faculty advisors to prepare the application documents. Students must develop a constitution that outlines the purpose of the proposed student organization. The HPE faculty advisors and students agreed that the importance of addressing recruitment and retention should be included in the purpose statement:

> The purpose of this organization is to unite students who are either current or prospective HPE majors, in an effort to further the professional advancement of its members, promote and publicize the major, assist in the recruitment and retention of HPE students, and serve the professional field at the local, state, and national level.

The integration of recruitment and retention into the majors club’s purpose statement positions the group to be a student-driven organization that can help to drive recruitment initiatives. Accordingly, the majors club complements several recruitment strategies already in place, including promoting HPE majors during general education kinesiology classes and having faculty present at prospective student recruitment events. The term “external recruitment” describes the recruitment of prospective students who are either not currently enrolled at our university, or are enrolled at our university but have not yet enrolled in a HPE major.

**Increased field experience interactions**

When addressing recruitment strategies using a high school majors club, Bert and Richards (2018) suggested interactions between recruits, preservice teachers, and faculty provide potential recruits with opportunities to learn what it means to be a physical educator. A major objective of this organization is providing HPE students with opportunities to teach extracurricular activities within local school districts. From an HPE faculty standpoint, these additional field experiences will hopefully enhance students’ pedagogical skills. However, they also provide prospective recruits opportunities to closely observe and interact with preservice teachers. At the end of these units, time is allocated to the asking and answering of questions regarding the process of becoming a teacher. Interactions with potential recruits also assist faculty members in gaining a better understanding of how to more effectively recruit high school graduates considering HPE teaching careers.

**Social media presence**

In recent years, social media has been utilized as a valuable method of communication between academic institutions and prospective students. Research suggests that a significant percentage of prospective students use social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, as a resource when selecting which college or university to attend (Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016). The majors club uses social media platforms to promote and advocate HPE to enrolled and prospective students. These accounts are linked to department web pages, directing potential recruits to information regarding the HPE major requirements for candidacy, graduation and certification. Our experience tells us this is important because HPE majors are often located within kinesiology departments and not education departments. How many potential HPE recruits are departments missing out on because they wanted to study the subject, were interested in attending the institution, but could not find the program listed because they searched in the wrong location?

**On-campus promotion**

There are several ways that club members act as recruitment agents by informally and formally promoting the club around campus. First, the club is listed on the student organization web
site. This is where a large number of students look for opportunities to participate in professional and social activities on campus. Second, we utilize our club members’ experiences at our recruitment events by inviting them to talk to prospective recruits about their HPE major experiences. We also invite club alumni to attend and discuss their student teaching experiences and careers postgraduation. Third, members have opportunities to purchase HPE majors club apparel, which they frequently wear around campus in an attempt to showcase the HPE majors.

Conclusions and Final Thoughts

Majors clubs provide opportunities to make contact with potential recruits through field experiences. This approach positions HPE students as recruitment agents whenever they are interacting with children in school environments. It may also help them to develop dispositions that embrace the role they will play recruiting new teachers once they transition into their teaching careers. A social media presence is considered to be a free modern-day marketing tool that aligns with current higher education recruitment strategies. Current students and alumni are considered a valuable promotional resource at on-campus events, as their opinions provide an overview of our majors, the faculty, and future careers. We believe that HPE faculty must take an active role in student recruitment if PETE programs are to survive and professional standards are to remain high during this period of difficulty.

References


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