

POTENTIAL QEP THEME: WELLNESS

Abstract:

Students at Radford University are not immune from the temptations that lead them to neglect their well-being; indeed, there is unfortunate evidence that RU students are more prone than their peers to make unwise and potentially fatal decisions about the use of alcohol. Thus, RU continues to struggle with an undeserved “party school” reputation, even in the face of formal and informal efforts on campus to promote mature behaviors that will lead to wellness. The adoption of wellness as a formal QEP theme among all at the University has the potential to change that reputation, enhance student learning, and encourage everyone at RU to make healthy decisions.

Overview of Theme:

As has been documented in numerous popular and professional outlets, the United States is facing a crisis of wellness; rising rates of obesity, especially among young people, are correlated with numerous medical problems and increased health care costs. Students at Radford University are not immune from lifestyle-related medical conditions. Moreover, there is evidence that RU students are significantly more likely than their counterparts at other institutions to matriculate having already engaged in risky behaviors or acquired high-risk habits (like binge drinking) that are deleterious to their ability to learn and to thrive at the University. RU’s unhealthy reputation as a “party” school both causes too many of these undesirable students to enroll here and is perpetuated by the presence of these students.

Current Status of Theme at RU:

Students at Radford University currently have access to multiple “natural” outlets for physical fitness—various trails for hiking and biking, local caves, canoeing, etc. Students can take advantage of the equipment and activities available through RU Outdoors, one of the institution’s most popular co-curricular organizations. There are also on-campus venues for wellness activities; these will be dramatically enhanced when the planned Fitness Center comes online—hopefully, during the early stages of the implementation of the QEP. Efforts to influence students’ choices about the use of alcohol and other potential addictive substances currently take place largely through UNIV 100 and classes in ESHE and through co-curricular programming sponsored by Student Affairs.

Ways Adoption of this Them Might Move RU Forward:

The adoption of wellness as the QEP theme could, over time, change the reputation of the University. Health-conscious recruits would appreciate going to a university that promotes wellness in all its students; students whose first interests are academic would feel more comfortable attending a University that does not have a “party school” image. Progress in the implementation of a wellness theme should be relatively easy to assess, since there are clear measures of individual and campus wellness that could be easily documented and compared.

Who Might be Involved in Implementation of this Theme:

Although the focus of the QEP must be upon student learning (i.e., changes in students’ knowledge, skills, behaviors, or values), the pursuit of wellness has the potential to be a theme in which the entire

campus could become involved. Professionals in some academic departments and in specific Student Affairs units could design fitness/wellness programs in which students, faculty, staff, and administrators could participate. Faculty could review syllabi and curricula with an eye toward the promotion of wellness (by, for example, demonstrating zero tolerance for students who miss Friday morning classes); simultaneously, Student Affairs professionals could examine and possibly redesign current judicial policies and procedures in the context of sanctioning “unwell” behaviors. Even Dining Services could take part by promoting the consumption of healthy foods that are already featured on the menu. Even financial benefits could be realized in the long run; e.g., Penn State estimates that it has saved \$80,000 annually in clean-up costs since it became a smoke-free campus.

Benefits for RU Students Resulting from the Adoption of this Theme:

Students who are physically, psychologically, and developmentally healthy will learn better, be less likely to run afoul of the judicial system, earn better grades, and be more likely to be retained and graduate. Moreover, gaining an appreciation for wellness by developing better habits or taking up a new physical activity could lead to life-long changes in behavior—changes that have the potential to extend lives, if not literally save them.