

## Value-Added University Services: The Importance of On-Campus Recreational Facilities

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### ABSTRACT



Successful universities know that they must view the students, faculty, and staff as important stakeholders and market to them accordingly. One of the most popular services on university campuses is a campus recreational facility. The purpose of this study is to understand the factors that influence a university community's satisfaction with campus recreational facilities. Community characteristics including motivation, loyalty, age, and gender; and facility characteristics including staffing, cleanliness, and parking were considered to determine their effect on satisfaction with the recreational facility. The results suggest that loyalty, staffing, cleanliness, and parking are significant indicators of satisfaction with on-campus recreational facilities.

### KEYWORDS

Higher education; marketing; recreation; services; satisfaction; universities

### Introduction

University administrators are beginning to utilize marketing strategies that have been proven to be successful in business on their campuses. Specifically, they are treating the university community as stakeholders and marketing to them accordingly. Recently, several innovative universities in the United States have taken this marketing focus to another level by instituting a true customer service initiative for recruitment and retention purposes. The customer service initiative takes cues from business and focuses on creating a university wide culture of exceptional customer service (Scott, 1999). There are several ways that universities can implement a customer service initiative on campus, but one of the most tangible ways is to build attractive facilities that provide value-added services (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1997). One of the most popular services with university communities is a campus recreational facility (Huesman, Brown, Lee, Kellogg, & Radcliffe, 2009). Americans are becoming more and more health conscious and universities and colleges feel that these amenities will help motivate the university community to develop and maintain healthy behaviors (Fontaine, 2000; Landers, 1997; Bouchard, Shephard, Stephans, Sutton, & McPherson, 1990; Chakravarthy & Booth, 2003a, 2003b). To

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assist those individuals who are focused on health and fitness goals, college recreational facilities often provide group exercise, personal training, and other types of specialized exercise instruction (Huesman et al., 2009). There are a few critics who argue that the money invested in these recreational facilities should be used for academic programs and technology, but the majority of college officials say that such investments for recreational facilities are worthwhile for many reasons (Reisberg, 2001). Some of the more obvious reasons are community satisfaction, student recruitment, and retention (Huesman et al., 2009).

The primary goal of this research is to evaluate the university community's satisfaction with campus recreational facilities and determine which factors influence these outcomes. Specifically, community and facility characteristics will be studied along with demographic information for their effect on satisfaction.

## **Literature review**

### ***Community satisfaction***

Satisfaction is a commonly found dependent variable in the marketing literature. Because this study is ultimately concerned with understanding the benefits of value-added services to a university community, satisfaction is an appropriate choice for the preferable outcome. Previous research has confirmed that service quality positively impacts satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Cole & Illum, 2006). More specifically, facility qualities encourage retention rates (Cole & Illum, 2006). Also, satisfaction, not surprisingly, leads to increased word-of-mouth recommendations (Cole & Illum, 2006). Increasing competition and budget cuts in higher education have recently forced universities to turn to satisfaction as a sign of quality. Image, value, and quality perceived are influential variables for satisfaction (Alves & Raposo, 2007). It has been suggested that colleges and universities should focus on the antecedents of student satisfaction so they could realign their processes and become more customer focused (DeShields, Kara, & Kaynak, 2005).

Service quality is "a measure of how well the service level delivered matches customer expectations" (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985, p.42). There are 10 factors affecting service quality including reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). SERVQUAL, a framework including dimensions of determining service quality, recommends different measures but also notes that each satisfaction survey should be adapted to the specific area (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Higher education recreational facilities are a unique service category and therefore many distinctive areas should be measured that go beyond the SERVQUAL variables.

### ***Community characteristics***

Faculty, staff, and students make up a university community. Their characteristics could affect their level of satisfaction with a university recreational facility; these factors include their motivation, loyalty, and demographic information, such as age and

gender. Individuals participate in physical activities for different reasons, whether it is to relieve stress, have a kick-start to their day, or to lose weight and/or gain muscle.

### **Motivation**

Motivation is a primary personal characteristic that affects a person's opinion of a fitness facility. The less motivated an individual is the less likely to achieve ultimate satisfaction with a fitness facility. Some motivational factors would be the pressure to fit in with societal norms, to avoid weight gain and the overall self-confidence gained from fitness. Motivation for physical fitness is most commonly related to physical activity and healthy eating habits (LaCaille, Dauner, Krambeer, & Pedersen, 2011). The primary motivating factors are often to stay in good physical shape, lose weight, and promote self-esteem (Ayers, Keeler, Watson, & Zizzi, 2004). If a university community has the desire to stay fit and eat healthy, then they should be more satisfied with a recreational facility on campus and the programs it has to offer. The motivation of an individual can influence their use of a recreational facility (LaCaille, Dauner, Krambeer, & Pedersen, 2011; Ayers, Keeler, Watson, & Zizzi, 2004). Student involvement is the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience (Astin, 1999). One factor that could contribute to involvement is whether or not a student commutes to campus. As universities continue to grow, the number of commuter students increases as well. Students that commute differ from noncommuter students in demographics such as age, attitudes, and opinions. Results showed that commuters are significantly less likely to take part in activities on campus (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011). It was also proven that 53% of commuters are nontraditional students meaning they do not have the same ideas, opinions, and ways of traditional students at universities (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011). Involvement in and out of the class is needed for a university to develop. In fact, studies have shown that participants that become involved in recreational sports on campus are more invested in campus activities (Elkins, Forrester, & Noël-Elkins, 2011). Students that are less involved on campus often experience more feelings of loneliness than students involved in campus activities. Getting the community more involved into campus activities can lead to students wanting to participate more in activities.

### **Loyalty**

Marketers know that it is more important and less expensive to keep an existing customer than to recruit a new customer (Reichheld, 1996). Therefore, successful businesses work to influence loyalty in their customers so that they have a reliable customer base. Instituting relationship-marketing techniques is a great way to retain customers and turn them into eventual loyal brand advocates. Loyalty is a complex mixture of attitudinal and behavioral elements (Oliver, 1999). Loyalty is made up of affective, cognitive, and behavioral components (Oliver, 1999). True loyalty exists when all three of the components are present.

### **Facility characteristics**

The facility itself must be appealing to the university community for it to be successful. Faculty, staff, and current and prospective students are looking for a professional and friendly staff that makes the facility welcoming and enjoyable. The recreation facility must also be clean with plenty of well-lit and accessible parking.

### **Staffing**

Studies addressing the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction have typically found that higher levels of service quality lead to higher levels of customer satisfaction (Gotlieb, Grewal, & Brown, 1994; Kang & James, 2004; Oliver, 1997). Although the operationalization of service quality differs among researchers, there is general agreement that service quality consists of three primary aspects, with one of these aspects, interactional quality (i.e., the interface between service staff and the customer), relating directly to staffing (Rust & Oliver, 1994; Brady & Cronin, 2001). A number of researchers have further elaborated on the sub-components of these broad dimensions (Birgit, 2008). For instance, as a part of their SERVQUAL framework, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) broke down the interaction quality dimension into three aspects. These included responsiveness (i.e., staff's willingness to help customers and provide prompt service), assurance (i.e., knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence), and empathy (i.e., caring and individualized attention the firm provides its customers). Brady and Cronin (2001) similarly subdivided the interaction quality dimension into three main parts: attitude, behavior, and expertise of the service provider.

Service quality has also been applied to research on the sports and leisure industry (Romo, Chinchilla, & García, 2010). In many of these studies staff once again surfaced as a key factor. For example, Kim and Kim (1995) developed the Service Quality of Sport Centers Scale (QUESC), identifying 11 dimensions of service quality in the fitness centers, with staff attitude being one of them. When using the QUESC scale Afthinos, Theodorakis, and Nassis (2005) found that the skills and attitudes of staff were among the components with the highest demand. Ko and Pastore (2001) suggested a model of four dimensions with a few subdomains, one of which again focusing on customer interaction with staff. Likewise, Calabuig, Quintanilla, and Mundina (2008) included the staff as one of its three dimensions. Finally, in a study examining the influence of service quality on membership renewal in fitness centers, the authors found that staff initiative and professional knowledge were significant predictors of renewal willingness with staff initiative being the most significant (Wei, Hung, Yang, Hsu, & Ma, 2010).

### **Cleanliness**

Similar to interaction quality, physical service environment quality has also been widely accepted among researchers as one of the three main aspects of service quality (Rust & Oliver, 1994; Brady & Cronin, 2001; Birgit, 2008). The physical service environment quality dimension typically refers to the "consumer's evaluation of any

tangible aspect associated with the facilities or equipment that the service is provided in/with” (Birgit, 2008, p. 539). This could include the physical conditions or cleanliness of a recreation facility’s restrooms, fitness studio, or weight room.

Customer satisfaction and loyalty is realized not only through the delivery of exceptional service but additionally through the quality of this physical environment (Barber & Scarcelli, 2010). Brady and Cronin (2001) and Raajpoot (2002) identified aesthetics (i.e., clean and visually pleasing) as being one of the key factors influencing perceived quality of the physical environment. Other studies have similarly stressed the importance of facility cleanliness. For instance, Rockman (1994) found that facility cleanliness had a positive impact on the customer experience. Wakefield and Sloan (1995) included cleanliness of facilities as one of their dimensions when measuring the perceived quality into spectators at a soccer game. Lastly, the findings of Birgit (2008) revealed that the cleanliness of the service facility was a satisfier of service quality, whereas the aesthetics of the service environment was a dissatisfier. The author also found that the absence of an essential part of services (e.g., cleanliness) has the greatest potential to drive customers away.

### **Parking**

Since the parking facility is often where a guest begins and ends their visit, satisfaction with parking has the potential of having a significant impact on the customer’s overall experience. Some of the most important features of a parking facility are the illumination of the lot and the ease of access to parking spaces (Rockman, 1994). Providing a sufficient number of parking spaces also contributes to the level of satisfaction experienced by visitors (Revell & Rich, 2001). Pupavac and Marsanic (2012) similarly found there to be a lower level of satisfaction if there was a lack of parking spaces or if the parking areas were not in the proper locations. Satisfaction with parking facilities has also been shown to vary by gender, with females generally rating parking facilities more harshly than males. One reason for this is that females are less likely to want to walk long distances in difficult weather conditions or in unsafe environments (Naser, Al Salem, & Nuseibeh, 2013).

Unfortunately, with the number of private cars owned increasing rapidly, there has become a shortage of parking capacity on most college campuses (Shang, Lin, & Huang, 2007). This issue is a campus characteristic that millions of individuals deal with on a regular basis. If there is no parking, individuals do not want to wait around for a place to park. Therefore, individuals become less satisfied with the campus recreational facility. One advantage that recreational facilities do have compared to other facilities is that the parking lots closest to the recreational facilities tend to have the highest turnover rate (Shang, Lin, & Huang, 2007), thus increasing the likelihood that a space is available for its guests and improving the overall experience. Another remedy to the parking shortage problems is better parking planning on the front end, which has been cited as playing a direct role in the level of satisfaction experienced by visitors (Revell & Rich, 2001).

## Hypotheses

Based on the literature review, the following community member characteristics relationships are hypothesized:

*H1:* As motivation increases, satisfaction with the recreational facility also increases.

*H2:* As loyalty increases, satisfaction with the recreational facility also increases.

*H3:* As age increases, satisfaction with the recreational facility increases.

*H4:* As gender goes from male to female, satisfaction with the recreational facility decreases.

Along with the following facility characteristics relationships:

*H5:* As the customer service of staffing increases, satisfaction with the recreational facility also increases.

*H6:* As cleanliness of the facility increases, satisfaction with the recreational facility also increases.

*H7:* As the lack of parking increases, satisfaction with the recreational facility decreases.

## Methodology

### Sample

Students, faculty, and staff at a mid-sized Atlantic university in the Eastern United States were chosen as the sample for this study. All members of the faculty and staff and students at the university received an e-mail with the link to the online survey. The incentive was a chance to win one of five \$100 gift cards to the on-campus bookstore.

### Measures

The measures were either constructed or adapted from established scales. The response format was standardized using a 5-point Likert scale. The measures for the dependent variable, community satisfaction, were adapted from Barrett (2003). The items were as follows: "I would rate the overall quality of the recreational facility as" (*very high–very low*), "I would rate my overall satisfaction of the recreational facility as" (*very satisfied–unsatisfied*), and "The grade I would give the recreational facility is one of the following" (*A–F*).

Next, the survey introduced scales for community characteristics: motivation, loyalty, age, and gender. Motivation items were adapted from Ebben and Brudzynski (2008). To measure motivation, respondents were asked to answer four items ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* on the following: "I work out for the health/fitness benefits," "I work out for quality time to myself," "I work out for quality time with friends," and "I work out to learn or improve a skill and/or activity." Loyalty was measured by one item, which was adapted from Osman,

Cole, and Vessell (2006): “I would recommend the recreational facility to my close friends.” Age had the following answer options: 17 or younger, 18–19, 20–21, 22–23, 24–25, and 26 or older. Gender was coded as 0 = male, and 1 = female.

Finally, facility characteristics were asked about such as staffing, cleanliness, and parking. Three items were adapted from Brathwaite and Eickhoff-Shemek (2007) and are as follows: (a) “The recreational facility staff is always willing to help,” (b) “The recreational facility employees have the knowledge to answer your questions,” and (c) “The recreational facility employees give personal attention to you.” Parking was assessed with one item: “I am satisfied with the parking lots located around the recreational facility.” Five items were constructed to measure cleanliness of the facility for this study: (a) “I am satisfied with the overall cleanliness of the recreational facility,” (b) “I am satisfied with the cleanliness of the recreational facility’s locker rooms/restrooms,” (c) “I am satisfied with the cleanliness of the recreational facility’s indoor track,” (d) “I am satisfied with the cleanliness of the recreational facility’s weight room,” and (e) “I am satisfied with the cleanliness of the recreational facility’s fitness studios.”

## **Data analysis**

### **Qualitative data**

An interview was conducted with the director of an on-campus recreational facility to help shape the eventual survey. The interview shed light on the most popular times of day for facility usage, the types of services and classes offered and the discussion of an incentive for the survey. Next, an eight-question pretest was conducted in the form of an open-ended, qualitative questionnaire. The questionnaire portion was distributed to twelve university students that use the recreational facility on campus frequently. These individuals all completed the questionnaire anonymously and the responses that were collected showed considerable variation. The responses ranged based on their open-ended structure but through the variability there were some ideas that were helpful to the final survey such as motivating factors for exercise.

### **Quantitative data**

The online survey resulted in a return of 242 usable surveys for this study. The data were analyzed using frequencies, ANOVA, and regression analysis. Descriptive statistics, correlations and regression results are reported in Tables 1–3, respectively.

### **Frequencies**

A total of 97% (236 respondents) that used the recreational facility to work out rated the overall quality as *high* or *very high*. Of the 236 respondents that used the recreational facility, 93% rated their overall satisfaction with the center as *high* or *very high*, 96% gave the recreational facility an overall grade of *A* or *B*, 89% of respondents

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics.

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD	Variance
Satisfaction	242	4.00	1.00	5.00	1.41	0.59	0.35
Motivation	242	3.17	1.00	4.17	2.28	0.63	0.40
Loyalty	242	4.00	1.00	5.00	1.40	0.76	0.57
Age	242	4.00	2.00	6.00	4.02	1.58	2.49
Gender	242	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.67	0.47	0.22
Staffing	242	3.00	1.00	4.00	1.75	0.74	0.55
Cleanliness	242	2.80	1.00	3.80	1.41	0.56	0.31
Parking	242	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.52	1.29	1.65

**Table 2.** Correlation matrix.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Satisfaction	1							
2. Motivation	.098	1						
3. Loyalty	.700**	.002	1					
4. Age	-.055	.234**	.013	1				
5. Gender	-.192**	-.062	-.148*	-.028	1			
6. Staffing	.451**	.239**	.361**	-.081	-.108	1		
7. Cleanliness	.443**	.151*	.408**	.124	-.096	.430**	1	
8. Parking	.279**	.089	.165*	-.053	-.045	.177**	.254**	1

\*Significant at .05 level.

\*\*Significant at .01 level.

**Table 3.** Regression results.

	Beta (t-value)	Sig.
Motivation	.045 (.978)	.329
Loyalty	.571 (11.700)	.000
Age	-.070 (-1.540)	.125
Gender	-.074 (-1.715)	.088
Staffing	.153 (3.006)	.003
Cleanliness	.109 (2.126)	.035
Parking	.119 (2.665)	.008

Note.  $R^2 = .572$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .560$ ,  $F$ -statistic = 44.737, significance = .000,  $n = 242$ .

who work out/exercise have used the recreational facility, 94% would recommend the recreational facility to family or close friend, and 92% of the respondents were satisfied with the cleanliness of the recreational facility. Only 55% of the respondents were satisfied with parking. Regarding the staff, 91% felt that the staff was willing to help, 80% felt the staff had knowledge to answer questions, and 70% felt the staff provided personal attention.

### Correlations

Parking, staffing, and cleanliness have a positive significance on satisfaction. Gender has a negative correlation with satisfaction but it has a significant correlation. As the parking at the recreational facility increases, the satisfaction increases. As the quality of the staff at the recreational facility increases, the satisfaction increases. As the cleanliness of the facility increases, the satisfaction of the recreational facility



increases. Moving from male to female results in a decrease in the satisfaction of the recreational facility. These four correlations were the most significant between the independent variables and dependent variable (satisfaction).

## Regression

The data were analyzed using regression analysis in SPSS. The dependent variable was satisfaction. The independent variables were motivation, loyalty, age, gender, staffing, cleanliness, and parking. Collectively the seven independent variables explained a significant amount of the variance in satisfaction ( $F(7, 234) = 44.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .57$ ,  $R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = .56$ ). It was found that loyalty ( $\beta = .57$ ,  $p < .001$ ), staffing ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $p < .01$ ), cleanliness ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and parking ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $p < .01$ ) significantly predicted satisfaction, thereby offering support for hypotheses 2, 5, 6, and 7. Motivation, age, and gender did not significantly predict satisfaction. Therefore, hypotheses 1, 3, and 4 could not be supported.

## Discussion

The regression analysis provided support for several of the hypotheses presented in this article. The community characteristics hypotheses results indicated that loyalty is the most important driver of satisfaction with the recreational facility. Hypothesis 2 proposed that as loyalty increases, satisfaction also increases. This hypothesis was supported by the analysis. Hypotheses 1 (motivation), 3 (age), and 4 (gender) were not supported. The facility characteristics hypotheses results were all supported. Hypothesis 5 suggested that increases in the customer service of staffing would increase satisfaction with the recreational facility. This hypothesis was supported by the analysis. Hypothesis 6 proposed that as the cleanliness of the facility increases, the satisfaction would also increase. This hypothesis was supported by the analysis. Hypothesis 7 stated that as the lack of parking increases, the satisfaction would also increase. This hypothesis was supported by the analysis. Therefore, all of the facility characteristics hypotheses as well as loyalty from the community member characteristics hypotheses were supported.

## Managerial implications

The results of the data analysis suggest several important practical implications for managers of on-campus recreational facilities. The most important finding is that facility characteristics matter more than community member characteristics. This finding means that an on-campus recreational facility can be successful regardless of their location or type of university community. By focusing on their staff's customer service skills and training, cleanliness of the facility, and availability of parking, they will attract satisfied customers. As they take measures to retain those satisfied customers then loyalty will increase, which in turn creates greater satisfaction with the recreational facility. Specifically, managers of on-campus recreational

facilities should focus their efforts and resources on hiring friendly and professional people to be a part of their staff. Further, they should spend the time and money to properly train the staff on the rules of excellent customer service. This investment in the staff will pay off in the long run success of the facility. Next, the managers should take extra care to make sure that the facility itself is clean at all times. The staff could be trained on the importance of maintaining a high standard for their facility. To address parking, the manager should take appropriate steps to maintain or gain access to convenient and available parking for the community members utilizing the facility. They could go a step further by having staff members park off-site to make more parking spaces available to customers. They could also consider creating or joining a transportation system that would transport people from remote parking lots to the recreational facility. Finally, the managers should place a heavy emphasis on creating loyal customers who will utilize the facility regularly and likely spread positive word of mouth communications to their circle of influence.

### Limitations and future research

This study was conducted at a mid-sized university on the eastern Atlantic coast of the United States. It is certainly possible that the community members in this location are more focused on physical fitness since their location is near the beach than another university in colder weather or further inland. This study was designed about on-campus recreational facilities, so the results should not be generalized to fitness facilities off-campus. Although this is a limitation of this study, the survey could easily be replicated in off-campus recreational facilities to compare the results. Future researchers should consider various types of recreational facilities to see if the results can be replicated regardless of location. It would also be useful to gather data at other universities in various geographic locations to see if the results hold true.

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