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START WITH WHY! HOW TO FOSTER HEALTHY CAMPUS COMMUNITIES THROUGH EXERCISE SCIENCE PROGRAM STEWARDSHIP



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Start with Why! How to Foster Healthy Campus Communities through Exercise Science Program Stewardship

Synopsis:

Obesity and inactivity trends are on the rise within higher education settings indicating a population needing healthy behavior interventions. Simon Sinek's Start with Why Golden Circle is a conceptual guide to connect undergraduate Exercise Science majors with on-campus experiential learning opportunities. This will ignite healthier behaviors within a higher education population while concurrently developing student leadership skills.

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Stewardship

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION: Placing student centered learning at the “why” level of Sinek’s golden circle conceptual model provides clear direction for higher education academic program development and success. When student majors are connected to the multitude of on-campus experiential learning opportunities within higher education environments, students will ignite a culture of health while improving professional skills necessary for their future careers.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this paper is to explore how Exercise Science programs can cultivate high impact learning practices for students while improving faculty, staff, and student health. **METHODS:** Author Simon Sinek’s *why, how, and what* golden circle concept provides a step by step transferable framework for program coordinators in Exercise Science and other disciplines to develop experiential learning opportunities for undergraduate majors. Assessment strategies which reflect development of model global citizens will be discussed using additional frameworks from the Healthy Campus 2020 guidelines and Social Ecological Theory.

IMPLICATIONS: Higher education settings encompass a snapshot of the larger obesity and inactivity epidemic plaguing our country. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) professional code of ethics encourages exercise leaders to positively influence the health of individuals and the community at large. Exercise Science undergraduate programs can foster this expectation of health and wellness stewardship within higher education settings.

Keywords: Experiential learning, healthy campus, student leadership development

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Introduction:

Stewardship is “the activity or job of protecting and being responsible for something” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stewardship>). The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) Code of Ethics centers on stewardship, with a guiding core value that advocates the Exercise profession “have a purpose to improve the lives of individuals and society at large” (<https://www.acsm.org/membership/membership-resources/code-of-ethics>). This demands service and a responsibility for *something*. Therefore, as an educator for 15 years in undergraduate Exercise Science programs and now as program director, it is my responsibility to foster the concept of “stewardship” among budding Exercise Science majors by demonstrating and serving as an active leader in promoting health and wellness in higher education settings.

A recent consensus statement from ACSM prioritizes physical activity in the United States. Exercise has consistently demonstrated positive health outcomes. But many fall short in reaching physical activity levels that elicit these positive health outcomes (Fulton et al., 2016). The population of students, staff and faculty that comprise higher education settings are not immune to this inactivity trend. Consequently, program leaders within Exercise Science must prioritize the connection of undergraduate majors to campus constituents needing health assistance. This creates relationships across campus that lead to experiential learning opportunities. In doing so, Exercise Science majors become visible health stewards to spark a culture of health within a university’s infrastructure, while upholding the professional obligation to serve. Learning the intricacies of health and exercise within the curriculum cultivates the engaged learning opportunities craved by higher education administration. Exercise Science majors orchestrating campus-wide exercise and wellness initiatives allows students to apply classroom content to real world scenarios; undoubtedly, a high impact learning practice.

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Connecting students to departments and programs across campuses that need health and wellness interventions will create a groundswell of optimism and foster interdisciplinary relationships. It can be a win-win situation for higher education settings to recruit and retain quality students, faculty and staff in the competitive higher education marketplace.

We developed an interdisciplinary collaboration within a higher education setting to combine medication management and exercise interventions. We demonstrated improved clinical outcomes and fitness parameters for employees suffering from hypertension, dyslipidemia, and type 2 diabetes mellitus (Bright et al., 2012a). A needs analysis conducted after the pilot program confirmed employee interest in both medication management and additional preventive wellness programming such as exercise interventions (Bright et al., 2012b). Our pilot program established curricular requirements for Exercise Physiology students to work with campus employees twice weekly for 13 weeks as part of a 15-week semester long graded course. The students were assessed for ability to conduct appropriate fitness assessments to gather data, design a proper exercise program, adapt the program as needed, and present final data points in a culminating presentation to an audience.

The interdisciplinary collaboration between the Exercise Physiology Program and the Pharmacy College centered on the following shared goals:

- Provide practical experiences for undergraduate students that improve professional knowledge, skills and abilities;
- Encourage faculty and students to be involved in interdisciplinary collaboration within higher education settings;
- Embolden faculty and students to practice skills representative of model global citizens; which includes, skills in conducting a needs analysis, planning and

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implementing a health intervention, and tracking data measures to determine program efficacy.

This aforementioned goal list meshes with author Simon Sinek in his book, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (2009). Sinek argues organizational leaders must know why they do what they do before implementing the day-to-day programmatic operations of the “how” and the “what” (see Figure 1).

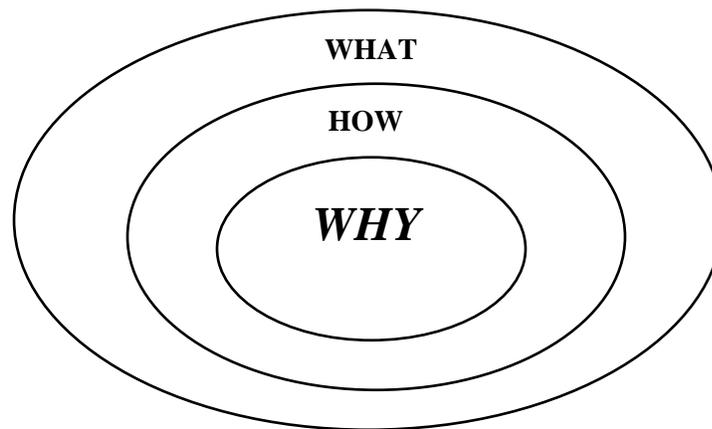


Figure 1: Start with Why. This figure illustrates a conceptual guide to developing high impact practices within Exercise Science Programs (Adapted from Simon Sinek’s *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, 2009).

When organizations align these 3 components of the golden circle, Sinek contends success and buy-in will result. This conceptual framework can easily be applied within higher education settings and within academic programs. For example, if Exercise Science program directors clearly articulate that the curricular’s purpose, or “why,” is to optimize student learning and engagement opportunities that develop global citizenship skills, then the “how” and the “what” become much more tangible to implement on a daily basis. Starting with why for higher education programs can crystalize an action plan. In the case of an Exercise Science program founded on professional stewardship expectations, this “why” can cultivate positive outcomes for

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faculty, staff, college, and most importantly, students. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to discuss:

1. Why Exercise Science program leaders should embrace stewardship opportunities that abound within higher education settings;
2. How Exercise Science program leaders can develop relationships that may lead to high impact learning opportunities for student majors;
3. What benchmarks Exercise Science program leaders can implement to assess outreach efficacy and potentially bolster college administration support.

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Higher education settings encompass a snapshot of the larger obesity and inactivity epidemic plaguing our country. Over the last twenty years, there has been a dramatic increase in United States obesity rates. According to the Center for Disease Control, thirty-three states had an obesity prevalence rate equal to or greater than 25% of its population (Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2009).

Obesity can present a tremendous burden on the health care system in health care costs and in lost worker productivity. In one study, employees with a BMI between 30 and 34.9 (obesity grade 1) had 14% more physicians visits than normal weight adults (Quesenberry, Cann, & Jacobson, 1998). This number increased to 44% for those employees at a BMI of 40 or more (Quesenberry et al., 1998). The association between BMI and coronary heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes was linked to the elevated costs; therefore, the high prevalence of obesity in the workforce and the associated elevated rates of health costs reflect a need for employers to examine health care programming to fight obesity in their workforce (Quesenberry et al., 1998).

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The economic impact of an overweight and obese country presents incredible challenges for employers who are struggling to absorb the financial costs associated with obesity, including direct medical bills and losses in employee productivity (Finkelstein, Strombotne & Popkin, 2010). Employers may absorb a hefty portion of the health care expenditures, paying an estimated “30% of the national health care bill” (Ickes & Sharma, 2009, p. 344). Health care costs are in an upward, and unsustainable trend, rising “from 7.2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1970, to 16% in 2008, with projections arching over 20% for 2015” (Partnership for Prevention, 2010, p.4). Higher education settings are an example employer where this economic crisis related to obesity can be impactful to its operational bottom line.

The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) position statement regarding the need to create a healthy workforce contends that “the health crisis and the workplace are inextricably linked” (ACOEM, 2009, p. 114) and challenges employers to finance preventative measures, such as exercise programming (ACOEM, 2009, p. 115). The *Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity (2001)* encourages employers to “create opportunities for regular physical activity during the work day” (United States Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2001, p. 25). According to this report, worksites are exceptional environments to run health programs because they offer opportunities for education, communication and peer support (USDHHS, 2001).

The population at college campuses is not just employees; the population includes students who are forging ahead into an often new transition of independence, including developing habits related to exercise and wellness. The greatest increases in obesity can fall between the ages of 18-29 years (Mokdad et al., 2001). A survey conducted at a Kansas university found 35% of the students polled would be classified as overweight (Huang et al., 2003). The increased prevalence

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of physical inactivity and obesity in the college student population strongly suggests that college students are excellent candidates for programs designed to increase daily physical activity (Ferrara, 2009). Staff, students, faculty, of all higher education departments, can benefit from relationships with Exercise Science majors who can provide guidance and motivation to pursue healthier behaviors which may attenuate this obesity and inactivity prevalence.

The “why” of Simon Sinek’s golden circle represents a clear need to solve the epidemic of inactivity and obesity. Yet, at another level, the golden circle offers a conceptual guide that can be used by Exercise Science program leaders to foster improved health within higher education settings based on professional standards for stewardship. If Exercise Science program leaders crystalize a “why” that cultivates student centered learning opportunities in accordance with professional stewardship expectations (Table 1), then leaders can partner students with campus constituents in need; a practice that can ignite a culture of health while enhancing professional skills of the students leading the charge.

Table 1: *Simon Sinek’ Conceptual Model’s Applicability to Exercise Science Program Stewardship*

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| 1) WHY: | Cultivate student centered learning opportunities in accordance with professional stewardship expectations. |
| 2) HOW: | Identify campus constituents willing to develop relationships with the Exercise Science program and its students to promote high impact learning. |
| 3) WHAT: | Measure and share quantitative and/or qualitative data points with all constituents to provide “proof” of program efficacy. |

(Adapted from Simon Sinek’s *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, 2009).

Such student centered learning opportunities have received incredible attention in education arenas to reduce teacher-centric control of traditional classrooms and increase students’ responsibility in their own education. The role of the instructor in student-centered environments is to encourage students to seek discovery learning. Instructors can construct authentic, real-life tasks that motivate learner involvement and participation (Weimer, 2002).

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Thus, when the “why” is established, the “how” and “what” of Simon Sinek’s golden circle can be applied more clearly.

Move to *How* by Seeking Collaborations:

The next layer of Simon Sinek’s golden circle conceptual framework is the “how” component, which can also be identified as the “collaboration” component. To sustain student centered learning, Exercise Science program leaders must branch outside traditional classrooms to build relationships with other university departments and disciplines. This collaboration can function at multiple levels. First, aligning various stakeholders within a college to optimize the campus population’s health is at the heart of the Healthy Campus 2020 recommendations. The *Healthy Campus Objectives* from the American College Health Association also challenges university leadership to involve multiple stakeholders to strengthen policies, improve practices, and empower behavior change. College campuses can create environments that promote health, productivity and positive health behaviors. Healthy Campus 2020 goals have specific trackable and outreach implications for Exercise Science programs that include:

- Increasing the proportion of faculty/staff/students who are at a healthy weight;
- Reducing the proportion of faculty/staff/ students who are obese;
- Increasing the proportion of faculty/staff/students who meet current federal physical activity guidelines for aerobic physical activity;
- Increasing the proportion of faculty/staff/students who meet current federal physical activity guidelines for muscle-strengthening activity (Adapted from The American College Health Association Healthy Campus 2020 Objectives, n.d.)

Secondly, encouraging collaboration across a university through development of inter-department and multidisciplinary programming is valued as an innovative teaching and learning practice (Henard & Roseveare, 2012). Partnering with the university’s Music Department to design an exercise program catered to musicians may reduce music majors’ injury risk related to repetitive stress from practicing and performing. In this example, the opportunity for

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interdisciplinary relationships between the Music Department and the Exercise Science Department could advance the students' capacity for interdisciplinary thinking that would be impossible to establish in isolation (Spelt, Biemans, Tobi, Luning, & Mulder, 2009). Such interdisciplinary thinking can be defined as “the capacity to integrate knowledge of two or more disciplines to produce a cognitive advancement in ways that would have been impossible or unlikely through a single disciplinary means” (Spelt et al., 2009, p.365).

The Music Department is just one example constituent who can benefit from collaboration with Exercise Science programs. The opportunities for collaboration are far reaching. For instance, connecting with the campus fitness director may result in Exercise Science students instructing group exercise classes or conducting personal training of faculty, staff and students. The student affairs department often launches stress-reduction workshops during peak exam times and may benefit from an Exercise Science student hosting a nightly yoga intervention during targeted time of high stress within the university. It is the Exercise Science program leader's responsibility to align campus resources and plant the seed with viable constituents to explore collaboration with an Exercise Science student. Figure 2 presents example collaboration opportunities for student learning and the advancement of health within the university setting:

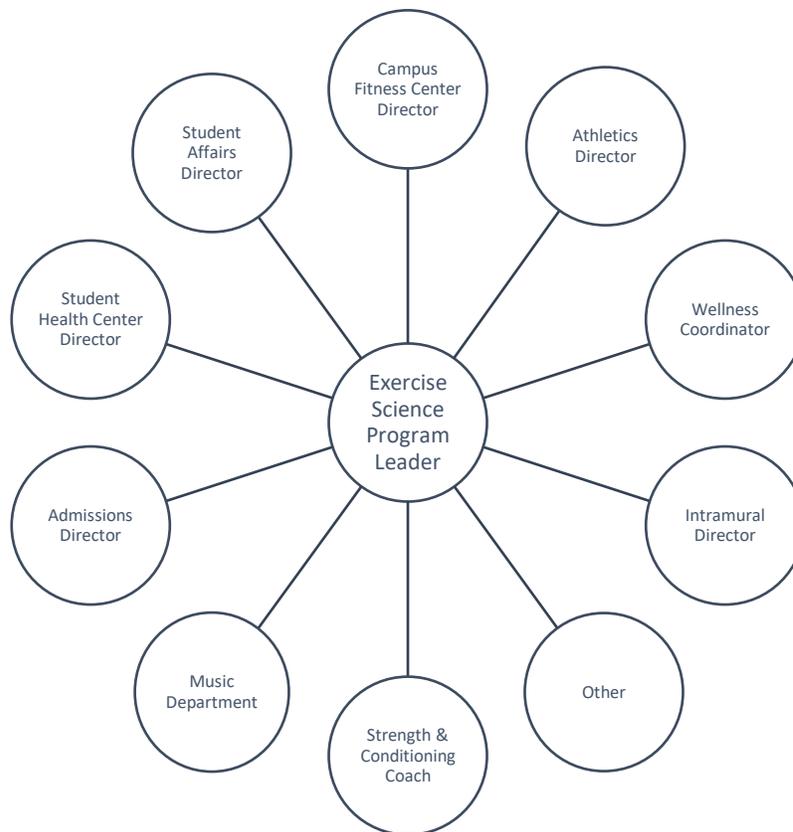


Figure 2: Example campus constituents. This figure illustrates example partnerships Exercise Science program leaders can pursue to connect majors to high-impact experiential education opportunities.

Finally, program leaders can steer discussions with viable constituents to focus on the *why*: providing experiential learning opportunities for students. The outcome for the university participants will be better quality of life, reduction in weight, and improvement of many additional health outcomes as exercise interventions have been consistently linked to positive outcomes (Garber et al., 2011). Once relationships are in place, the next step involves teaching students the logistics of assessment, research, and data collection in their outreach which are characteristics of responsible global citizenship.

Implement the “What” by Practicing Skills of Responsible Global Citizens:

Simon Sinek’s golden circle encourages leaders to start from the inside and work outwards with the “why” at the heart of the circle, to serve as an organization’s guiding purpose.

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The next part of the circle, or the “how,” are the specific actions to implement the why, and finally, on the outside of the circle is the “what” or the tangible proof in which the “why” is brought to life in day to day operations. The Healthy Campus 2020 objectives can be applied in executing this last phase of the golden circle concept within Exercise Science programs. The Healthy Campus 2020 initiative not only outlines national health objectives to improve student, faculty, and staff health, it also provides a toolkit for healthy behavior program implementation. It is based on a transferable action model that can operate with a social ecological approach.

The transferable action model under the Healthy Campus 2020 initiative is entitled “MAP-IT”: Mobilize, assess, plan, implement, and track. Although this MAP-IT framework may be geared toward health initiatives, the skills students develop by using this framework cross all academic disciplines to demonstrate skills of responsible global citizenship. Table 2 provides an example of how the MAP-IT model can be used within Exercise Science programs that prioritize student centered learning and establish collaborations within the campus community.

Table 2: *MAP-IT Program Planning Action Model*

| MAP-IT Steps | Questions Associated with Executing the MAP-IT Action Model | MAP-IT Model Applied to Exercise Science (EXS) Programs |
|---------------------|---|--|
| MOBILIZE | Who cares about health on campus and how can we connect? | EXS program leader and/or EXS students connect to the Music Department. |
| ASSESS | What does the campus community, or targeted group, need? | EXS students assess the performance demands of musicians by completing a task analysis. |
| PLAN | What could be the goals and objectives of this outreach? | EXS majors conduct pre-screening, fitness assessments, and create goals for an exercise prescription based on data collected. |
| IMPLEMENT | What are the evidenced based practices that can influence the project implementation? | EXS majors use research related to the arts and performance along with curricular knowledge to implement an exercise intervention. |
| TRACK | What was found and how can this data be reported to the individuals involved and the campus at large? | Pre and post data are presented to the individuals involved, the music department, and the academic |

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| | |
|--|-----------------|
| | administrators. |
|--|-----------------|

(Adapted from the American College Health Association Healthy Campus 2020 Action Model, n.d.).

In the example of Table 2, a group of Exercise Science majors work with music students to improve overall fitness through a semester long exercise intervention they develop as part of a required Exercise Science curricular experience or as part of a professional service outreach. The MAP-IT framework allows students to practice skills required of health professionals by identifying a population in need, completing a needs analysis, conducting pre-testing for initial data points, applying data points and content knowledge to develop an exercise intervention, implementing the intervention, completing post-testing and reporting data findings to a greater audience.

Teaching students to use data points to assess program efficacy is a professional skill woven in many allied health professions. Administration is interested in the economical return on investment (ROI) of wellness and prevention programs. Although estimations for employer health promotion programs ROI have been projected between \$1.49 to \$4.91, predictions by students within their experiences may not be feasible (Ickes & Sharma, 2009; Naydeck, Pearson, Ozminkowski, Day, & Goetzel, 2008). It is challenging to quantify ROI. But documenting changes in biometric measures such as reduction in cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar levels, body mass index and improvements in aerobic fitness, strength and flexibility are easily trackable and offer exceptional proof of improved health as a result of exercise interventions. Therefore, exposing students to the importance of data tracking and reporting to organizational decision makers is a valuable skill that will serve them well as future exercise professionals. Additionally, college administration herald documented experiences that can link to common higher education buzzwords such as engaged learning, undergraduate research, professional

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experiences and interdisciplinary collaboration; all of which creates tremendous marketing potential for the competitive higher education atmosphere of today. Consequently, in operating at the “what” component of the golden circle, data from exercise interventions can provide the “proof” to springboard important conversations with campus administration on the health of its campus population.

At an even deeper level, applying the MAP-IT framework operates within the theoretical concept of Social Ecology, a highly touted model associated with enacting behavior change. Golden and Earp (2012) note that ecological models over the last twenty years have garnered attention in public health discourse, with increasing support from the World Health Organizations (WHO), Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Social Ecological model recognizes that behavior is affected by individual factors, interpersonal processes, institutional or organizational factors, community factors and public policy (Linnan, Sorensen, Colditz, Klar & Emmons, 2001; Sorenson, Linnan & Hunt, 2004). In other words, there are multiple levels of influence acting on a person at any given time related to healthy decision making (Terrell, 2015). The Social Ecological model behavior determinants and descriptions are noted in Table 3:

Table 3: *Social Ecological Model’s Five Levels of Influence on Behavior*

| Determinant | Description |
|--------------------|--|
| Intrapersonal | Focuses on the individual’s own set of characteristics, such as knowledge, attitudes, behavior, self-concept, skills, etc. |
| Interpersonal | Formal and informal social network and social support systems which can include, but is not limited to family, work groups, and friendship networks. |
| Institutional | Social institutions with organizational characteristics and formal and informal rules and regulations for operation. |
| Community factors | Relationships among organizations, institutions and informal networks within defined boundaries. |
| Public policy | Local, state, and national laws and policies. |

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(Adapted from McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler & Glanz, 1988, p. 355).

The aforementioned example operates at the Interpersonal level of the Social Ecological model in which social support can empower people to pursue optimal health. Social resources provide a valuable sense of self and overall wellbeing (McLeroy et al., 1988, p. 357). Indeed, models like the Social Ecological model will determine participation patterns within health outreaches (Golden & Earp, 2012).

Application of the MAP-IT model can cultivate support at the Institutional level of the Social Ecological Model. When Exercise Science majors lead successful exercise interventions that are documented through consistent qualitative and quantitative outputs, student programs may influence college administration to support health initiatives “which includes concerns about health outcomes in both tactical and strategic organizational decision making” (McLeroy et al., 1988, p. 361). Management at every level of an organization, including higher education, is critical to enhancing or inhibiting the health of all constituents within the organization (Della, DeJoy, Goetzel, Ozminowski & Wilson, 2008; McElroy et al., 1988). The data obtained through implementation of the MAP-IT framework may generate incredible leverage and momentum for administrative support of expanded campus health initiatives. Aligning as many layers as possible within the Social Ecological framework improves the likelihood that successful long-term behavior change will occur, fostering success of all health initiatives on college campuses.

Conclusion:

Author Simon Sinek argues that organizational leaders, which includes program directors within higher educational settings, must crystallize a “why” to drive the “how” and “what” of their organizational operations. Applying this golden circle concept to Exercise Science

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programs can result in multiple positive outcomes in university settings for program majors and the campus community as a whole. Exercise Science programs must embrace a “why” which includes facilitating experiential experiences that develop student professional skills related to increasing physical activity and exercise in the campus community. How this can be done is simple: program leaders must prioritize the development of visible relationships with as many campus constituents as possible. In doing so, opportunities for student outreach to improve faculty, staff and student health can be discovered, allowing students to practice the skills of a successful model global citizen: assessing the population needs, planning and implementing an intervention, and tracking data to assess program outcomes. This is stewardship; this is responsibility for something and it is right at our fingertips on our college campuses.

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