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Journal article by Iii Frank Ormond, Tom Roberts, Jim Dewitt; JOPERD--The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance, Vol. 68, 1997

Journal Article Excerpt

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Swim Test Requirements at Four-Year Universities in the United States.

by III Frank Ormond , Tom Roberts , Jim Dewitt

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Statistics from the National Safety Council (1995) indicate that drownings were the fifth leading cause of death in the United States in 1993 with more than 4,500 fatalities nationwide. In 1992, the last year that deaths were broken down categorically, the 15 to 24 year old (17.5%), 25 to 44 year old (27.5%), and 45 to 64 year old (16.5%) age groups had the highest percentage of drownings. These statistics emphasize the need for teaching water safety skills to those who may not have acquired them earlier in life. Are our colleges and universities, which are in a good position to provide these skills, fulfilling this responsibility? Or, have they begun to back away from mandatory swimming requirements in the face of shrinking budgets and decreased physical education requirements?

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A survey of four-year colleges and universities in the southeastern United States by Ormond, Roberts, and DeWitt (1995) found that only 14 percent of the colleges and universities in this region of the country had a swim test requirement. These findings confirmed the trend noted in national studies of physical education programs by Oxendine (1961; 1969; 1972), Oxendine and Roberts (1978), and Trimble and Hensley (1984; 1990) that showed a 30-year decline in the number of four-year universities that had a swimming requirement.

Most of the universities that dropped their swim test requirement did so during the late 1960s and early 1970s. While the trend to drop the swim test requirement slowed in the 1980s, it still persists. Although many universities dropped their swim test requirement because of cuts in programs and lack of administrative support, student support for a swim test requirement remained strong. Arwe and Jacobs (1981) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Lumpkin, Leath, and Almekinders (1989); and Lumpkin, Ormond, and Smith (1995) at North Carolina State University found that students strongly supported a swim test requirement and recognized that the requirement was an important step toward teaching everyone basic swimming skills and water survival skills. Arwe and Jacobs (1981) also reported that half of the students who were enrolled in a beginning swim class were there because they did not pass the university swim test. Without a swim test requirement, individuals who cannot swim and/or are afraid of the water would not normally take a swimming class. Thus, their opportunity to learn water safety skills would be lost.

A survey was developed to expand the Ormond, Roberts, DeWitt (1995) study to include four-year universities from all 50 states regarding their swim test requirement. The survey was intended to include 12, four-year universities of various sizes from each of the fifty states (n=600). The universities surveyed were chosen by random sample from American Universities and Colleges (1992). During the random sampling, it was found that some states did not have 12, four-year universities with an enrollment of at least 500 students; this reduced the sample size (n=483). Questionnaires (table 1) were mailed to the 483 universities selected, and 331 were returned for a response rate of 69%.

Table 1. Swim Test Survey

Does your university require a one-time swim test of the entire student population in order to assess swimming ability?

YES

- * Must a student take your swim test to graduate?
- * Must a student pass your swim test to graduate?
- * If a student does not pass, must he/she enroll in a beginning swim class?
- * How often (times per year) do you offer this swim test?
- * Does your swim test require students to swim a certain distance and tread water for a specific amount of time?
- * What skills are required of your students during the swim test?

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