

Ethical Situations Faced by Student Employees in Campus Recreation

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Introduction

In recent years, institutions of higher education have been encouraged by stakeholders to improve student ethical development since students will likely face significant ethical decision-making during post-graduation employment (Hanson & Moore, 2013). This positively coincides with previous studies which indicate that incoming college students arrive with alterable levels of ethical maturity and can be influenced by university experiences and interaction with faculty and staff (Astin & Antonio, 2004). Additional research is needed to identify the university factors that can impact student ethical development and decision-making. Thus, this study is motivated by the interest in understanding the ethical reasoning of campus recreation student employees.

Purpose Statement

This study aimed to identify if students encounter ethical situations while working for campus recreation and whether they apply ethical reasoning in their decision-making.

Methodology

This qualitative study utilized the particularistic case method to inquiry. The particularistic case study is recommended for practical problems that arise in everyday operations (Merriam, 1997). This is a defining feature of this study's interest in understanding the ethical situations and reasoning that occurs during campus recreation employment.

The researcher developed a questionnaire containing items with rating scales and open-ended items. This was a one-time census survey of student employees who worked for Campus Recreational Sports for at least one semester, worked a minimum of 15 hours, and were enrolled as full-time students. There were 442 student employees who were invited to participate, 218 responses received, and 163 complete cases.

The survey responses were evaluated using the Valid Assessment of in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) Rubric for Ethical Reasoning. This rubric was developed to evaluate demonstrations of student knowledge and understanding of ethics. The two rubric elements utilized for this study were ethical issue recognition and application of ethical perspectives/concepts. The researchers independently coded the data according to the VALUE Rubric and then cross-checked the codes. The researchers achieved 80 percent agreement for recommended reliability and consistency (Miles & Hubberman, 1994).

Results

One of the survey questions asked participants to "Describe an ethical issue you faced during your experience working in Campus Recreational Sports and include how you addressed it." In response to this question, 79 out of 90 participants accurately recognized an ethical situation and 73 participants accurately applied ethical reasoning. There were 56 participants who reported that they had not faced an ethical situation while working.

The majority of responses were assessed with ratings of 3 for ethical issue recognition and application of ethical perspectives and concepts. This implies that participants were able to accurately recognize when ethical issues were presented in the work environment and apply ethical perspectives and concepts, but did not fully consider the implications.

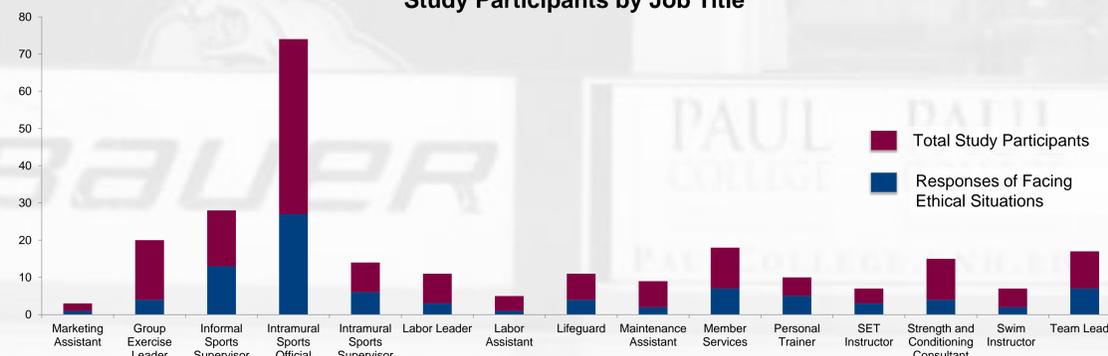
Ethical Reasoning VALUE Rubric

	Capstone 4	Milestones 3	Milestones 2	Benchmark 1
Ethical Issue Recognition	Student can recognize ethical issues when presented in a complex, multilayered (gray) context AND can recognize cross-relationships among the issues	Student can recognize ethical issues when issues are presented in a complex, multilayered (gray) context OR can grasp cross-relationships among the issues	Student can recognize basic and obvious ethical issues and grasp (incompletely) the complexities or interrelationships among the issues	Student can recognize basic and obvious ethical issues but fails to grasp complexity or interrelationships
Application of Ethical Perspectives/ Concepts	Student can independently apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question, accurately, and is able to consider full implications of the application	Student can independently (to a new example) apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question, accurately, but does not consider the specific implications of the application	Student can apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question independently (to a new example) and the application is inaccurate	Student can apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question with support (using examples, in class, in a group, or a fixed-choice setting) but is unable to apply ethical perspectives/concepts independently (to a new example)

"One of the ethical issues you often face as a Swim Instructor is the difference between doing what is right for the children in the class and what their parents want. A parent may think that their child should move up to level 4 even though you know it's better for them to stay in level 3. Usually I'll discuss each of my students with my Director and see what she thinks is best based upon my observations and then I will make a decision."
- Swim Instructor

"One ethical issue I face is trying to even out the calls between the two teams. One team is always going to foul more and I wonder if I should call it fairly for one side or the other. I addressed this by not paying any attention to the team jersey or worrying about the overall foul count and just calling what I see."
- Intramural Sports Official

Study Participants by Job Title



Recommendations

Future Research

The results of this study provide evidence that this area is in need of future research. Now that we know student staff are facing ethical situations, there are many questions to answer, including:

- 1) The need for more in depth studies of how to address ethical situations.
- 2) How do student staff learn to address such situations?
- 3) What do students learn about ethical reasoning from their experience working at Campus Recreation?
- 4) Does training for the position equip students for ethical situations they will face on the job?

Practitioners

- 1) Review training for each position to determine if adequate preparation provided for staff, particularly for enforcing policy.
- 2) It is important for students to reflect on situations they face. Remember to take time to help them process each situation.

Literature Cited

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Further Information

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