Student Wellness through Physical Activity Promotion in the Academic Library

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Abstract:

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Keywords: wellness | academic libraries | physical activity | physical movement

Chapter:

*****Note: Full text of chapter below**

Chapter 12

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Introduction

To advertise its week-long "De-Stress for Success Campaign" in December 2018, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville Libraries created a special logo consisting of four figures that represent four facets of how the library supports students during academic

finals (figure 12.1): (1) a dog, representing therapy dogs; (2) a light bulb, representing ideas generated with academic support; (3) a flower, representing massages and free food; and (4) a human figure in yoga's lotus pose, representing the library's "living room" initiative, with fun physical activities throughout the week.[1] Around the same time, the Nanyang Technological University Library in Singapore unveiled its #NTUsgLibraryCares campaign, oriented around an acrostic of the word *CARES*: with *C* for *Creativity*, *A* for *Academic Resources and Services*, *R* for *Rejuvenation*, *E* for *Exercise*, and *S* for *Social* (figure 12.2).[2] To support exercise, the library has GreenBikes, stationary bicycles that students can pedal to exercise and to charge their electronic devices.

Figure 12.1
Logo for "De-Stress for Success Campaign." Courtesy University Libraries at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

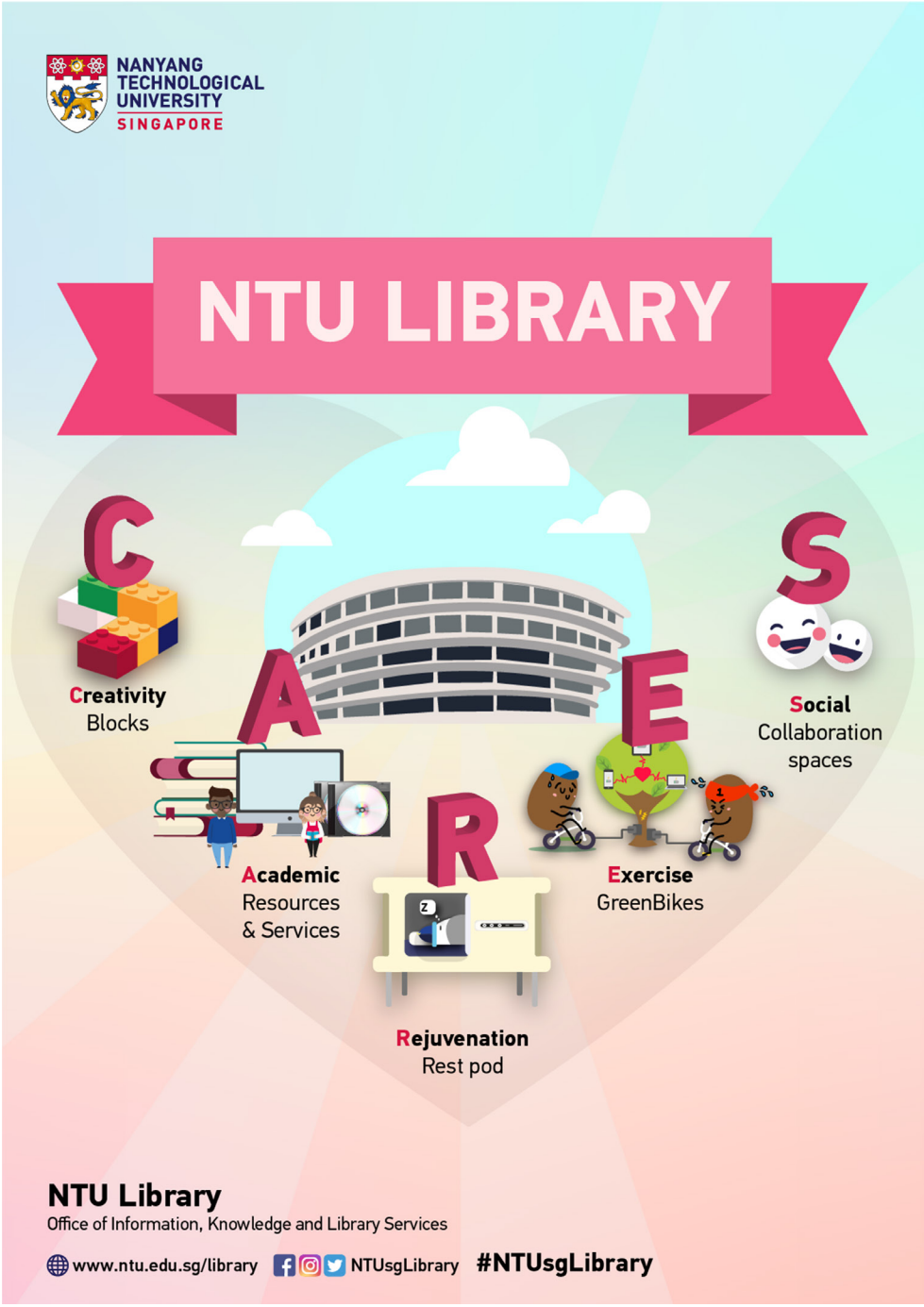

Figure 12.2
Logo for #NTUsgLibraryCares campaign. Courtesy Nanyang Technology University Singapore Libraries.

These two figures succinctly represent the orienting idea of this chapter: that physical activity is, and should be, part of the conversation about how academic librarians support student success. This literature review explores this idea and analyzes how and why academic libraries, primarily in the United States and Canada, support physical activity. This review is contextualized within a discussion of the concept of wellness. The chapter concludes with a discussion of additional work needed to integrate physical activity into our conversations about student success.

Wellness in the Library

Since the 1970s, *wellness*, and related terminology such as *whole person*, *integrative health/medicine*, and *well-being*, have become increasingly common in our societal and medical discourses.[3] Prior to the emergence of these concepts, the dominant model was one in which different institutions addressed different facets of personhood: You go to the gym to exercise your body, to the library to exercise your mind, and to counseling for mental therapy. With these new concepts, however, boundaries blur. There is now more of an expectation that all institutions will do a little bit to support all dimensions of wellness, even as some institutions specialize more in some dimensions than others.

A sign of the arrival of this idea into the discourse of academic librarianship is Hinchcliffe and Wong's 2010 article, "From Services-Centered to Student-Centered: A 'Wellness Wheel' Approach to Developing the Library as an Integrative Learning Commons."[4] Drawing upon the new theories introduced above, Hinchcliffe and Wong discussed how academic librarians support six dimensions of wellness: spiritual, intellectual, emotional, occupational, social, and physical. Hinchcliffe and Wong saw academic librarians supporting the physical dimension of wellness through programs, including "Yoga Study Break[s]" and walking challenges.[5] In this framework, to support wellness requires academic librarians to, at the very least, think about how they could help support healthy physical activity. Physical activity—via the discourse of wellness—became part of the conversation in academic librarianship.

This trend has been growing during at least the last fifteen years in academic libraries. On the vanguard of this trend was Goucher College in Towson, Maryland, where administrative documents reveal that as early as 2002 librarians discussed including "a yoga/stretch/dance/contemplation space"[6] in their new library. When it finally opened in 2009, the library included a cardio room, with ellipticals, exercise bikes, and rowing machines that students could use. Asked why he thought the library needed such a space, Goucher President Sanford J. Ungar stated, "I think that if we are going to have a place where you can do everything, exercise should be part of it."[7] In her study on the evolution of this new library, Cunningham interviewed a user services librarian who stated, "The idea was to give students a reason to be in the library a long time,"[8] and according to this librarian that is precisely what happened. More students spend more time in the library after the renovations than before.

Putting Physical Activity into Practice in the Academic Library through Partnerships

These new ideas can be seen in the contemporary practices of librarians at Wake Forest University (WFU) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. In a presentation on how their library supports the "whole student," librarians discussed supporting physical wellness.[9] The opening slide featured two images of moving in libraries: on the left, students doing yoga in a reading room, and on the right students doing a conga line through the library. The presentation then provided an overview of how the library supports physical wellness through strategies such as (1) buying standing desks, Zenergy ball chairs, and FitBikes; (2) designating walking paths through the library; and (3) holding special programs such as yoga, Friday night dances, and humans versus zombies Nerf wars. The slides stated, "The library is always open to opportunities to contribute to the physical wellbeing of WFU students and these can take many forms."[10]

A review of the literature written by academic librarians about physical activity (table 12.1) shows that in most cases (fifteen of the eighteen articles), librarians develop these initiatives through partnerships. Through these partnerships, the library becomes part of the broader fabric that supports student wellness and student success. As Ramsey and Aagard argued, "By parlaying their reputations as trusted information providers and community centers, academic libraries can partner with more traditional campus health providers to be active and effective participants in this essential form of outreach."[11]

This literature suggests that in addition to positively benefitting students, these partnerships enable academic librarians to learn new things. Alsop and Bergart argued instructional librarians can learn a lot by observing how fitness instructors structure their classes. They concluded: "Just as most fitness classes include a relaxation and stretching portion at the end of the class, incorporating simple wellness strategies such as stretch breaks and contemplation into library instruction can help to create an atmosphere conducive to learning."[12] Meanwhile, Wilkes discussed becoming an embedded librarian at the campus rec center and as a result developing new relationships with students: "At first I was a bit out of my comfort zone.… It was definitely a different space to see students."[13] But she found that sweating with students made her seem more approachable and available for academic support.

Similarly, at the University of California, San Diego, efforts to increase physical activity among library staff led to efforts to increase physical activity among students. In 2007, the library started offering free yoga classes for its employees.[14] Those classes continue to be offered, and one spin-off has been efforts to integrate more physical activity into the library. The library purchased two WalkStations (treadmill desks) in 2014, and they've been well received and heavily used.[15]

In forming partnerships to develop these new initiatives, academic librarians have in some cases looked beyond obvious partners (i.e., the rec center). For instance, Roanoke

Table 12.1
Articles by academic librarians on physical activities sponsored and supported by academic libraries (full citations included in the bibliography).

Article	Services	Rationale	Partners	Location	Campus
Cunningham, "Athenaeum"	Cardio Loft: exercise equipment	All-inclusive library: library as comprehensive student center	Goucher Facilities Project Manager, among others	Towson, Maryland	Goucher College
Aiken, Cadmus, and Shapiro, "Not Your Parents' Law Library"	Squash court	Support leisure time recreation	None specified	Ithaca, New York	Cornell University Law Library
Chant, "Fit for the Library"	Stationary bikes	Study on effects of exercise on productivity and learning	Psychology Department	Clemson, South Carolina	Clemson University's Cooper Library
Shreffler and Black, "Library Olympics"	Library Olympics	Fun student engagement with the library	Partnerships across library units	Dayton, Ohio	University of Dayton
DeClercq and Cranz, "Moving beyond Seating-Centered Learning Environments"	Incorporate physical activity into design of library spaces	Incorporate healthy movement into sedentary library activities	Architecture students	Berkeley, California	UC East Asian Library
Meyers-Martin and Borchard, "Finals Stretch"	Dance & exercise breaks including yoga, Zumba	Part of libraries' Finals Time Programming	Multiple campus and non-campus partners	Multiple (279 libraries surveyed)	Multiple (279 libraries surveyed)
Rose, Godfrey, and Rose, "Supporting Student Wellness"	Yoga sessions	De-stressing at the library during finals	Student Services	St. John's, Newfoundland	Memorial University Libraries

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Shaffer, "Sweating in the Stacks"	Exercise-study hybrid bikes	Impact student health and challenge stereotypical perceptions of the library	None specified	Troy and Dothan, Alabama	Troy University Libraries
Smith, Lock, and Webb, "Library for the Whole Student"	Programs and spaces to support physical activity	Libraries for the "whole student": physical wellness in the library	Student groups, Athletics, Campus Recreation	Winston-Salem, North Carolina	Wake Forest University
Goodson, "Walk It Off"	WalkStations (treadmill desks)	Frequent user requests for "active seating"	Librarians Association of the University of California, San Diego Division	San Diego, California	UC San Diego Library
Vilelle, "Uniquely Lendable Collections"	Check out a bike at the library	Support active transportation	Campus Recreation; Sustainability Committee	Roanoke, Virginia	Roanoke College's Fintel Library
Potlapalli, Exploring the Possibility of Alternative Desks	Bike desks, standing desk, and under-desk ellipticals	Prolonged periods of sitting linked to health problems	None specified	Houston, Texas	Fondren Library—Rice University
Auberry, "Physical Literacy in the Library"	Fitness classes; Health & Self Club at the Library	Support health literacy, fill gap created by lack of on-campus rec center	Student groups, Campus Coalition Government	Port St. Lucie, Florida	Indian River State College

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Eberle, "Bringing Mindfulness to the Academic Library"	Exercise bicycles, Check-out Yoga & Gardening Supplies	"Holistic Mindfulness Initiative"	Office of Wellness Education, Health & Counseling Center	Andover, Massachusetts	Merrimack College's McQuade Library
Wachter, "A Space Apart"	Meditation room with yoga mats and Zenergy ball chairs	Reduce stress and anxiety for diverse student body	College leadership provided extra funding to create space.	Tulsa, Oklahoma	Tulsa Community College's West Campus Library
Power and Munro, "Exercise Bikes at the Library"	Exercise bikes	Introduced to align with the university's health and wellness initiatives	Environmental health & safety; insurance, risk management.	Windsor, Ontario	University of Windsor's Leddy Library
Clement et al., "Reading, Writing, and … Running?"	Active learning space with treadmill, standing, & cycling desks & balance chairs	To encourage physical activity while using library space to promote active learning	School of Information Sciences	Knoxville, Tennessee	University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Casucci and Baluchi, "Health Sciences Library Promotes Wellness"	Free yoga classes for ten weeks	To bolster wellness and connect to the health sciences community	College of Health, Continuing Education, & Campus Recreation	Salt Lake City, Utah	Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library

College's bike library developed from a partnership with the campus sustainability committee.[16] Similarly, the University of Georgia's Bulldog Bikes—check out a bicycle from one of three university libraries—is a joint initiative between the campus sustainability office and the campus libraries.[17] And at Temple University in Philadelphia, the Sustainability Office partnered with the library to offer a series of Goat Yoga programs to students in fall 2018, which had a goal of encouraging students to learn more about urban agriculture in a fun, engaging, and unexpected manner.[18]

Librarians also develop these activities to foster the idea that the library is a cool, and worthwhile, place in which to spend one's time. At Kent State University in Ohio, the library tweeted that its "Haunted Library" event would be "the biggest Halloween on campus," with a live DJ and dancing throughout the evening.[19] Similarly, the librarian responsible for bringing stationary bicycles to Troy University in Alabama stated that "it is important to find creative ways to bring people back to the library."[20] Others set out to repudiate stereotypical ideas that libraries are spaces only for the mind, and not for the body. Writing on the Leddy Library's recently installed study bikes, Power and Munro stated that "libraries have long been thought of as places for exercising the mind, but study bikes give students the option of getting a physical work-out too."[21]

This trend has been further developed by efforts to create recreational spaces in libraries. Aiken, Cadmus, and Shapiro discussed law librarians putting "increased emphasis on collaborative and even in some instances recreational spaces in the library, like game rooms with Ping-Pong and pool tables."[22] They discussed the fact that the Cornell University Law Library has a squash court within it, and included photographs of that squash court being utilized, providing evidentiary weight to the fact that this form of intensive physical activity is in fact taking place within an academic library.[23]

In still other places, these efforts represent a response to student interests and needs. For instance, at Salem State University Library (Massachusetts), the librarians sent students a survey in fall 2018 asking them what they would like to see the library offer during finals. One of the options was yoga classes, and since this option received so many votes, the library offered yoga during finals 2018.[24] These types of services also emerge in response to needs not being addressed elsewhere. In Florida, Indian River State College's Pruitt Library offers monthly Zumba and aerobic walking classes at the library. One of the reasons librarian Kendra Auberry gave to justify these services is the fact that there is no gym on the campus she serves, and also that many students, because of their modest means, cannot afford fitness options available elsewhere. Auberry and the library stepped into this void by creating a Student Exercise Club (since renamed the Health and Self Club).[25]

Categorizing How Physical Activity and Academic Librarianship Come Together

This review of the literature found academic librarians support physical activity through (1) special programs, (2) new uses of space, and (3) new collections. Although comprehensive

data does not exist, there is some evidence that special programs may be the most common method academic librarians use to support physical activity. Meyers-Martin and Borchard surveyed a self-selecting sample of 279 academic librarians about their finals week programming. The survey did not explicitly ask about physical activity programming; options provided included therapy animals, movies, nap spaces, arts and crafts, social media, gaming, or other. Nevertheless, fully 47 percent of respondents selected the "other" category and wrote in that they offer programs ranging from chair massages to "dance and exercise breaks including yoga, Zumba and hula hoops."[26]

To investigate the prevalence of this type of programming, I conducted an informal study during December 2018 to see how physical activity was being supported during academic finals. Using Twitter, I conducted nightly keyword searches during the first three weeks of December for terms like "libraries" and "finals" or "libraries" and "yoga" to see what types of special programs academic libraries were offering.[27] Among the results of this study were the Brain Break program at the University of Toronto's Robarts Library that invited students to enjoy fun fitness activities led by staff from campus rec at the library. In Scotland, the University of Glasgow Libraries invited students to meet at the library at noon every day during finals for a one-mile run. Academic libraries also had special exercise bike programs at Nicholls State University's Ellender Memorial Library in Thibodaux, Louisiana, and at Merrimack College's McQuade Library in Massachusetts. Yale University's Bass Library invited students to "Recharge …with a free Zumba class at the library."[28] Finally, it seemed that yoga was being offered everywhere, with special yoga programs at the University of Lincoln (United Kingdom); Old Dominion University Library (Virginia); the University of Michigan at Flint's Library; Arapahoe Community College Library (Colorado); Adelphi University Libraries (New York); Georgia Tech Library; Jacksonville State University's Houston Cole Library (Alabama); Marquette University's Library (Milwaukee); Saint Anselm College's Library (New Hampshire); University of Nevada Las Vegas Library; California State University, Chico's Meriam Library; Mount Royal University Library (Calgary); the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's SILS Library; Lone Star College Library (Texas); the University of Wisconsin–Madison's Art Library; the University of Maryland, Baltimore; and Brandeis University's Library (Massachusetts). Even though we still do not know how common these types of special programs have become, we do have clear, if anecdotal, evidence that these types of programs are being offered in a wide variety of academic libraries in many parts of the US and Canada, and beyond. More research is needed to generate more comprehensive data on this trend.

New Uses of Space

In addition to offering special programs, academic libraries also support physical activity through space redesigns. For instance, DeClercq and Cranz discussed University of California, Berkeley, librarians working with architecture students to identify how library spaces could support physical activity. They concluded that academic libraries should strive to have "a mix of furniture options that together welcome a variety of healthy postures" as well as "rooms where students can stretch" and other "opportunities to introduce physical

activity into library settings."[29] Toward this end, librarians elsewhere have installed FitDesk study bikes and Desk Treadmills, while others have created walking routes that encourage students to get up and go for a walk in the library.[30] At Walsh University in Ohio, librarians worked with University Wellness to create laminated guides that were placed on tables throughout the library, and also attached to the walls (figure 12.3). These guides show easy exercises, such as body weight lunges, that can be done in the library.[31]

WALSH UNIVERSITY
A Catholic University of Distinction
University Wellness

All participants are encouraged to receive their physicians' clearance before starting any suggested exercise.
Perform exercises at your own risk and judgement.

Lunges

1. In upright position with eyes forward, chin up, and shoulders relaxed, step forward with one leg lowering your hips.
2. Inhale as you lower yourself to the ground with one leg forward and one leg back.
3. Both knees should be at a 90-degree angle with front knee directly above your ankle and back knee should not touch the floor (but come close to the floor).
4. Keep weight on the back of your heels.
5. Breathe outward as you return to the original starting position.
6. Repeat a total of 3 sets, lunge down the row of books and lunge back up the row of books. Rest 30 seconds between sets.

Figure 12.3
Exercise suggestions for the library. Courtesy Megan K. Allen, Director of University Wellness, Walsh University.

There has also been a growth of spaces created both for meditation and movement. The literature on these spaces tends to emphasize their contemplative role as spaces for quiet and stillness,[32] but evidence suggests these spaces also facilitate, and are designed for, movement and healthy physical activity. For instance, in fall 2018, McGill University in Montreal unveiled its new Tranquility Zone. In addition to relaxing seating and meditation spaces, the Zone also includes stability balls, foam rollers, yoga blocks, and

trigger point massage balls, suggesting that the purpose of the room encompasses both stillness and movement.[33] Similar purposes can be discerned in the University of Toronto Library's Reflection Room. According to the library's website, as well as the flyer posted on the physical entrance to the room, acceptable "activities welcome in the room" include "prayer, meditation, yoga, [and] mindfulness."[34] Again, we see physical activity and meditative stillness intertwined in these new spaces.

New Collections

The mixing of mindfulness and movement also appears in Merrimack College's McQuade Library in Massachusetts. There, the library started "a holistic mindfulness initiative" that included, among other things, purchasing four exercise bicycles "for students to take an active and mindful break from their studies" and assembling kits that students can check out for physically active pursuits such as yoga and gardening.[35] Similarly, the Medical Library at East Tennessee State University embraced this trend by purchasing twenty yoga mats and four bicycles that can be checked out from the library. In addition, "the library basement includes a room with several spin bikes and hand weights for in-library use."[36] The library's website states that "these items are provided as part of the library's commitment to supporting our students, faculty, and staff as whole people."[37] Here again, we see physical activity incorporated into academic library space designs focused on health, wellness and the "whole person."

Vilelle discussed Roanoke College's bike library, where, as of 2016, there had been 275 checkouts per bike, per year, between 2010 and 2016.[38] According to the librarians, the bikes are constantly in use during periods of good weather. Academic libraries also check out bicycles at the University of Georgia, East Tennessee State University, Keene State College in New Hampshire, and McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, among other locations.[39] In addition, at Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina, and at the University of Maryland, libraries check out a variety of sports and fitness equipment for students to use.[40] Discussing law libraries, Aiken, Cadmus and Shapiro wrote that "it is also not unusual at the law libraries at Yale or Cornell to find non-traditional items available for check out. Patrons can borrow, for example, bicycles, soccer balls, soccer goals,"[41] suggesting these types of collections are becoming increasingly common in law libraries.

Discussion: Making Movement Part of the Conversation

At this point, one may reasonably ask this question: Why focus on the physical dimensions of wellness in the academic library? An answer to this question appears in recent work in public health that has identified physical *in*activity as a pivotal issue of our time. The World Health Organization (WHO), and most other public health organizations, now recognize physical inactivity as one of the most intractable public health crises. Dr. Regina Guthold, a lead author of a 2018 WHO study on this topic, stated, "Unlike other major global health risks, levels of insufficient physical activity are not falling worldwide,

on average, and over a quarter of all adults are not reaching the recommended levels of physical activity for good health."[42] In other words, despite increased knowledge of the health and wellness benefits of regular physical activity, if anything this problem is getting worse, not better.

In the context of this public health crisis, it is wrong to assume that this issue is someone else's problem. Everyone has a part to play in addressing this issue, as the WHO argued in its recently unveiled campaign Let's Be Active: Everyone, Everywhere, Everyday.[43] Gone are the days in which physical activity promotion could be relegated to specific times (e.g., physical education classes) and spaces (e.g., gyms and rec centers). Summarizing recent research on this topic, Cregan-Reid wrote that "we need to build activity into our everyday lives, not just leave it for the gym."[44] This is especially true among college students. Recent research published in the journal *JAMA Pediatrics*, as reported by NPR, found that "young women, especially young women of color, tend to get less exercise than their male counterparts, and the disparities worsen after high school ends."[45]

Being physically active throughout life requires learning, as recent work on physical literacy points out.[46] This fact is sometimes overlooked in commentary that frames movement as mindless (think of the classic dichotomy wherein we are exhorted to exercise our minds at the library as we exercise our bodies at the gym). We are also awash in toxic images of body shaming and ableist discourses that imply physical activity is only for those with certain abilities and in which the presumed goal is to look a particular way.[47] In the context of these problematic discourses, college students need to learn to see regular physical activity as a core component of overall wellness. From a public health perspective, the goals of increasing physical activity are to enable myriad health benefits (including mental health benefits), regardless of how one looks and regardless of one's abilities.

Academic libraries could (and in some places already do) play a unique role in campus initiatives to promote healthy physical activity. Academic libraries could do more to support healthy movement by creating programs to try out new forms of physical activity in spaces that may be seen by some as safer and less threatening than a more traditional gym and by partnering with other campus entities to educate students and library staff about how to live balanced lives that include regular physical activity as part of that balance. The opportunities are many, but to activate these opportunities we first need to make physical activity part of the conversation by actively engaging with potential partners on our campuses and by communicating with students (as Salem State University did) to develop programs and to let them know that these options are available.

These efforts could be jump-started by beginning the conversation among library staff. The efforts of American Library Association President Loida Garcia-Febo to highlight physical activity programs for library staff in places such as Smith College and Merrimack College illustrate the type of initiative that could develop into efforts to support physical activity among students (as they did at the University of California, San Diego).[48] Documents such as the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity's Healthy Meeting Toolkit could be used as starting points for discussing physical activity as an intrinsic dimension of wellness, for both staff and patrons.[49]

Furthermore, we also need much more research on this trend. This chapter only scratches the surface. Future research on programming in academic libraries, especially during finals, needs to look into physical activity programming. We also need more data on the incorporation of physical activity into space designs and collections. Finally, we need case studies and other research that investigates the impacts of these efforts. Nevertheless, this chapter has shown that these services are being developed and offered, typically with partners, by academic librarians throughout North America, and beyond.

Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to push forward the conversation on physical activity in academic libraries by showcasing and discussing some of the services academic libraries currently offer, and some of the reasons why they are offered. Will (or should) every academic library have exercise equipment and yoga classes? The answer is no. But should these (and other things discussed above) be options academic librarians consider when going through planning processes? The answer is yes. If movement is not part of our conversation, then innovation in this sector is impossible. The question is not Do I now have to become a yoga instructor to become an academic librarian? The question is How do I form, leverage, sustain, and assess partnerships that will enable my library to have a positive impact on wellness (including physical wellness), and therefore success? More conversations around wellness and well-being (for staff and students) should be happening in academic libraries, and these conversations should include physical activity.

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