





TAPPING INTO STUDENTS' DESIRES WITH TECH-BASED EXERCISE EQUIPMENT

BY DAVID VINSON, PHD

College students can face an uphill battle when it comes to staying physically fit, not least of all because with newfound independence comes daily opportunities to develop bad habits, dietary or otherwise. Think all-you-can-eat meal plans, limitless soda machines, pizza buffets, and all-nighters fueled by caffeinated, sugary drinks. Between the stress of coursework and balancing that stress with fun and social activities, students often find that little time remains for exercise.



An ongoing challenge for private universities and colleges has been to create a culture of health and wellness on campus, one that inspires students to make time each day for self-care. The good news for students is that campus-based fitness and recreation centers are designed with stunning ambition, in that they are beautiful and inviting, and also cutting-edge in terms of the exercise equipment and facilities offered. Moreover, students are able to access nutritional programs as well as a wide range of resources oriented towards mental and emotional health. Students are empowered to make positive changes, and they are given the tools to maintain them.

Normalizing Health and Wellness with Mobile Technologies: Innovation at Harvey Mudd College

Private universities and colleges are discovering that the ubiquity of smartphones is not a hindrance to cultivating a campus-based culture of health and wellness. In fact, institutions across the country are using technology to reach students in a manner most comfortable to them, through their smartphones. This practice is a fine example of how to normalize health and wellness among a diverse, tech-oriented student body.

Harvey Mudd College (Claremont, California), for instance, has adopted a program called Kognito, an avatar-based app available to all students, and one that will be extended to families, faculty, and staff in the near future.

Kognito teaches students how to be more self-aware as well as to be more aware of their environment with respect to friends, peers, and classmates. Students learn the symptoms of distress in themselves or someone else, and they learn what interventions could be pursued prior to reaching a high level of distress. The broader goal is to demystify stress as that which is unmanageable or scary, and one can imagine the utility of such skills during these uncertain times.

Kognito also makes accessible for students the health and wellness resources available to them on campus and in the community. Examples include the Linde Activities Center (where students can lift weights, play basketball, and enjoy aerobics) as well as Roberts Pavilion (where students can attend recreation classes such as CrossFit, Jungle Gym, Spin, Yoga, and B-Fit, among others). Information regarding a high-quality food program at Harvey Mudd is also available via Kognito, and students can learn how to sustain a healthy diet with lean meats, fruits and vegetables, vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free options.

Making the Gym “Smart”

Students love their portable technologies—their smartphones, wireless headphones, laptops, and so forth. They also value technology that transforms otherwise dull exercise routines into fun, interactive challenges. One example is the treadmill, which was surely an exciting novelty when

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it was new, yet the appeal of running in a confined space has long since worn off.

Now, one's running time can be cut in half via curved tread specifically designed for sprinting. In fact, some treadmill-like machines are built without a motor, which means that the runner's strides actually power the entire endeavor. The result is far more realistic because the runner determines the pace at all times.

Students also enjoy interactive screens as they exercise, and the market for such innovation has boomed in the last decade. Numerous stationary bikes, rowing machines, and treadmills now offer interactive programs with real instructors and fitness classes, thereby revolutionizing the entire concept of the indoor workout. Users

get one-on-one instruction similar to that of a personal trainer, and they have access to thousands of archived classes that educate and meet their evolving needs.

Students want to experience cutting-edge technologies, and in recent years, the most innovative exercise machines incorporate online programs that are "live," meaning in this case that an instructor can remotely control the user's setting, adjusting incline, decline, speed, and resistance—something very few companies offer. The result is something that entertains and motivates, and users can interact as if they are actually running through the Alps or rowing on the Thames.

Some programs even offer a unique use of Google Maps, which allows users to exercise

by way of real landscapes without a trainer. (As a side note, the tourism industry should be ecstatic since this program effectively allows users to get to know a place prior to visiting it.)

Multi-station strength training machines are another great option for students. Such machines offer a huge slate of strength training options, and some even incorporate Silent Magnetic Resistance and flywheels to eliminate clanging weights. A built-in tablet screen works to provide a range of HIT or cross-fit style workouts, and these can replicate everything from kettlebells to basic weight training.

Thwarting Unhealthy Habits

Because we want our students to thrive in mind as well as body, we must pay careful attention to what they would want in any ideal fitness and recreation center.

For these reasons, it is key that we keep a close eye on innovations in the market for exercise equipment. Technologies swiftly become outdated, replaced by those that are more versatile, efficient, and fun.

A fitness and recreation center that offers cutting-edge exercise equipment represents a sound strategy for helping our students resist the unhealthy habits that so easily develop when they leave home for the first time.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. David Vinson has a PhD in English with specializations in transatlantic literature and cultural studies. He is a committed scholar, teacher, and dad. If you ever meet David, avoid the subject of soccer. His fandom borders on the truly obnoxious.

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