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Development and Application of the Small School Recreational Facility Accessibility for Those with Disabilities (SSRFAD) Instrument

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Rimmer (2005) notes that people with disabilities do not engage in sport and recreational facilities as frequently as their non-disabled counterparts. According to Rimmer, Riley, Wang, Rauworth, & Jurkowski (2004) this is primarily due to barriers, both physical and environmental. These barriers are often in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and employers and facility managers are actively working to address these issues (Grady & Andrew, 2002; Mahoney & McMillen, 2011) which may be the fault of poor facility design (Mazumdar & Geis, 2003) or administrative mismanagement. However, according to Pate and Waller (2012), sport facility managers have some, but not comprehensive, knowledge of ADA compliance issues. Grady and Carpenter (2007) provided training to professionals to sport and entertainment managers which improved their knowledge of access substantially. However, no such training has ever been developed for college sport and recreational professionals.

Research on access to college sport and recreational facilities is more frequent and substantive than on recreational, community and professional sports settings. This may be due to the fact that these settings have been beholden to various laws related to access before the ADA by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, because colleges and universities provide both spectator and participatory activities which both need accommodation, or because of the relative ease of facilities to academic researchers. Regardless of the reason, researchers have examined aspects of collegiate sport and recreational access including parking at athletic facilities (Pate, Bemiller & Hardin, 2010), a case study on facility access (Mestayer, Black, Edwards, Cottingham, & Behlmann, 2011), facility managers knowledge on access (Pate & Waller, 2012), and knowledge of facility managers (Pate and Waller, 2012).

However, all of the aforementioned research focuses on Division I athletics and none focus on the development and application of training of facility examination which Pate and Waller recommend. There are currently 349 Division I schools but another 729 Division II and III recognized by the NCAA. These Division II and III schools do not have the resources to develop their own tools to examine access and their facilities often must serve the purpose of both participatory and spectator sport. The purpose of this study was to develop and test an instrument to examine facility access for recreational facilities for Division II and III universities; NAIA and community colleges would benefit from the survey as well.

In order to accomplish this, the Small School Recreational Facility Accessibility for those with Disabilities (SSRFAD) assessment tool was constructed. This instrument includes 35 items segmented into two sections that identify 1) potential structural impediments, which may or may not violate current ADA federal regulation building codes, and 2) possible social or programmatic barriers that may hinder those with disabilities from visiting the site as spectators or using the facility as athletes. Items are listed in binary yes/no question format for initial analysis, intended to serve as the origin for expanded discussion into school-specific issues concerning accessibility of the recreation center and sporting events. For this reason, the SSRFAD instrument may serve as an excellent educational tool to raise awareness of accessibility for undergraduates within sport management or recreation courses.

The SSRFAD items that examine physical barriers focus on indoor portions of the facility and exclude outdoor field and spectator areas, which are often absent in schools with fewer students. Items are derived from the 2010 Standards for Accessible Design, which consists of enforceable building specifications for public accommodations, state and local government facilities and commercial buildings. These criteria are based on the 2004 ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG). Due to the high variability of activity-specific rooms (e.g. weight room, pool, racquetball courts, etc.) within each recreational center, items were chosen based on their applicability to a broad range of rooms and common structural elements located within facilities. Examples of questions include "Is the bench seat height in locker rooms between 17 and 19 inches from the ground (to facilitate transfer from a wheelchair)?" and "Does elevator signage for floor numbers contain both raised characters and braille?" To gain full

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appreciation and impact of these standards, at least one test facilitator is encouraged to assume disability during the examination of the facility.

Items that identify potential social and programmatic obstacles are derived from interviews with athletes with disabilities as well as concerns presented in a previous case study (Mestayer et al., 2011). These questions examine the extent of facility managers' preparedness and knowledge of accessibility and are targeted toward athletic directors, public safety officers and related supervisors. Items include "Does formal staff training include proper use of person-first language?", "Does the evacuation protocol include when and how to safely transfer those with disabilities?" and "Is there companion seating available adjacent to wheelchair-designated seating areas?"

Preliminary applications of the SSRFAD survey at a Division III university in the Midwest indicate that the test is simple to apply and that the facility is compliant with the current building code regulations listed within the test. However, knowledge of accessibility was incomplete. Continued applications of the SSRFAD tool at diverse types and sizes of universities are ongoing and will allow non-Division I schools the ability to competently examine accessibility within their recreational facilities.