New graduate course for 2020-2021 – T2 (Winter)  Monday 1 - 4 pm Online

Kinesiology 500v Seminar Proposal:  Gender and Culture in the Gym.
Winter semester, 2020. Graduate research and writing workshop to explore physical activity and health behaviours among Asian female students at Canadian Universities

Overview
Anxieties about physical inactivity are called up in many environments as reason for promoting policies for active living, and for urging sectors of society to help make active living a more desired, affordable and accessible choice. Such a call however tends to promote policies and practices based upon western cultural and biomedical understandings of the nature and level of physical activity required for healthy living and unidimensional ways of promoting it among diverse multinational populations. These prescriptions can pay insufficient attention to the perceived needs, interests and abilities of diverse populations as well as issues of access and affordability.

Given the growing call from health promoters and exercise specialists for university students to become more active and enjoy being active, we use the example of the University of British Columbia (Vancouver) to examine the feasibility of such a call to a widely diverse group of students from a variety of cultures involved in many kinds of learning and social activities. Recent numbers suggest that UBC has the highest population of international students of any university in North America, with 16,098 students enrolled in the 2019/2020 academic year, a 57% growth from the 12,110 students enrolled in 2015/2016. Of these students, 5,956 come from China alone, while a combined 3,419 students come from other Asian countries including India, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

The recent virus emergency has alerted us that Universities with growing international student populations may need to add more cross-cultural content into their curriculum and fitness programs, increase awareness of cultural differences on campus and provide access to information that might remove physical activity participation barriers. Broad explanations offered for this situation include the effects of a disruption of social support networks for female Asian students including loneliness, lack of social support, language difficulties, unrealistic family demands, and self-expectations. Financial problems, adverse experiences in a new country and racism have all been shown to lead to higher levels of depression and academic stress and contribute to inactivity.

This course will broadly explore the physical activity and health behaviours among Asian female students at UBC (and other Canadian universities) as well as levels of access (real and perceived) to fitness and sports facilities with the aim of developing a series of research and position papers written by graduate students in conjunction with myself and possibly some senior undergrads. This collaboration will train students in conducting culturally sensitive focused research activities, collaborating with managers in place and activities already offered, dealing with translated material, co-authoring a series of research papers and policy documents and developing prescriptions (in line with current offerings) for more culturally sensitive health, fitness and sport offerings on UBC campus (and potentially elsewhere).