



# Exercise is Medicine at UC San Diego

Liezl Agatep, Andrea Hwang, and Ruth Roh  
 Department of Family Medicine and Public Health  
 University of California, San Diego



## Background

- Physical exercise has been proven to be beneficial to one's mental, emotional, and physical health by improving mood, increasing self-esteem, decreasing stress levels, and preventing chronic diseases (Mekkelsen et al., 2017).
- Only 23.3% of UC San Diego undergraduate students meet national guidelines of 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity physical activity (ACHA-NCHA II, 2019)
- 45.2% of UC San Diego students "felt so depressed that it was difficult to function" and 63.7% of UCSD students "felt overwhelming anxiety" (ACHA-NCHA II, 2019)
- The RIMAC Voucher Program enables UC San Diego students to attend group exercise classes at no cost to them. The Counseling and Psychology Services (CAPS) prescribe vouchers to students in hope of improving mental health. It has since been utilized by students, but the vouchers are not always able to cover the total cost of the classes, and the CAPS has a limited amount of funding to spend on vouchers each year. There is a need to expand the program in a "no cost" way.
- Exercise is Medicine- On Campus (EIM-OC) is an initiative founded in 2007 that promotes the belief that physical activity is important to the prevention and treatment of diseases

## Objective

To implement the Exercise is Medicine-On Campus (EIM-OC) program to supplement the existing RIMAC Voucher Program and elevate the importance of physical activity as a way to improve the mental health and well-being of UC San Diego students.

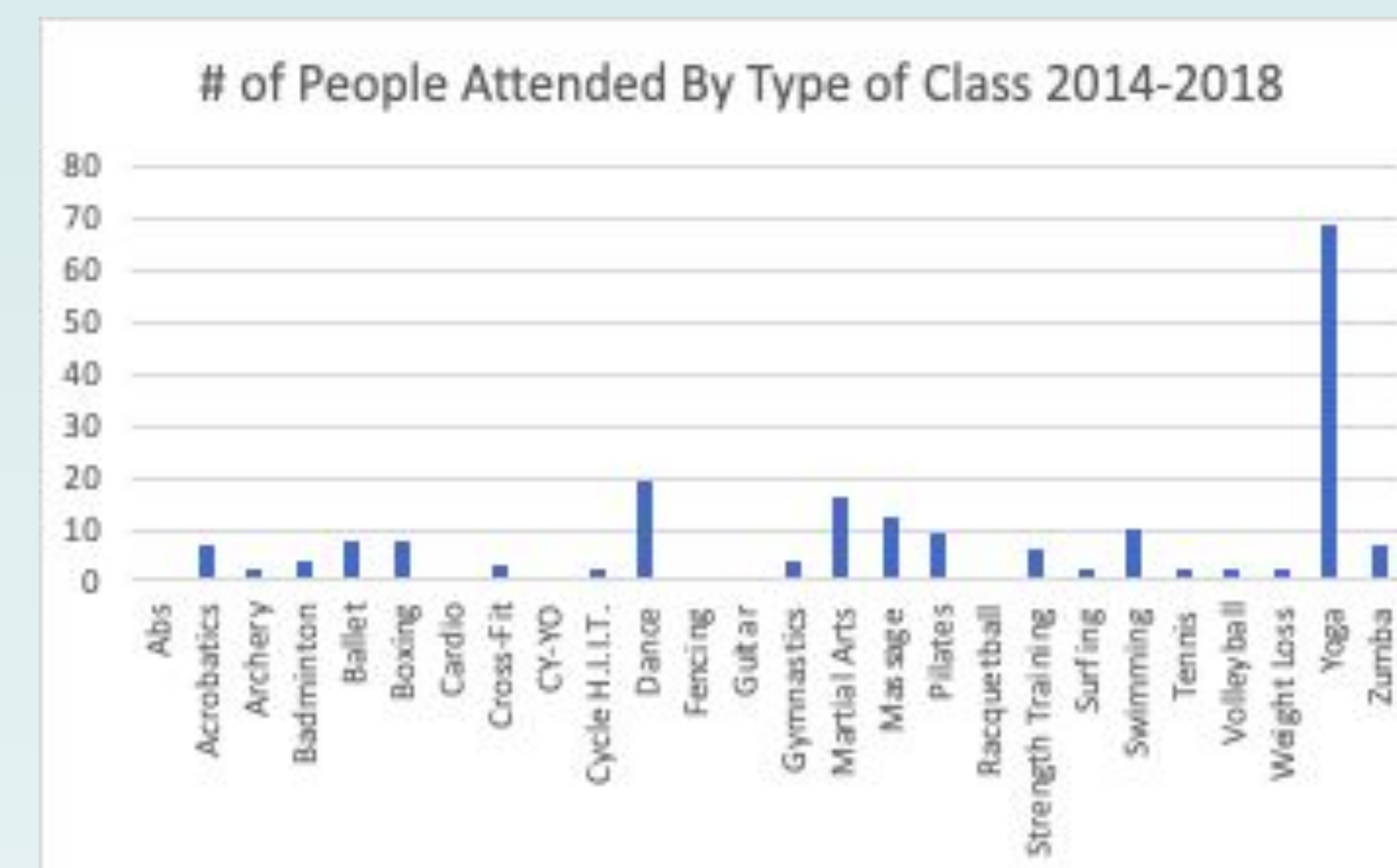
## Methods

- Attended a meeting with Counseling and Psychology Services (CAPS)
  - Identified the RIMAC Voucher System expansion in a "no cost" way to UC San Diego students as a project that would serve the needs of CAPS
- Contacted CAPS and obtained data on the RIMAC Voucher System from 2014-2018
- Analyzed existing data and processed different policy program alternatives based off the program gaps
- Generated a policy brief proposal in regards to the implementation of the Exercise is Medicine-On Campus initiative to UC San Diego to expand the Voucher program



## Results/Outcomes

- The RIMAC voucher was utilized 293 times from 2014-2018
- Yoga classes are the most popular attended class followed by dance classes and martial arts classes
  - Approximately 35% of the vouchers redeemed were for yoga classes
- From 2014-2018, CAPS spent \$4,642 to cover the cost of just yoga classes and \$11,919 overall
- However, RIMAC vouchers do not cover the cost of yoga classes 51% of the time vs. 27% of the time for other classes



## Conclusion

After examining the current status of the RIMAC Voucher Program, we have come to the following conclusions:

- There is a lack of data about details of the RIMAC Voucher Program; thus, we would need to continue collecting data on the Program (e.g how many vouchers given vs. how many redeemed)
- The vouchers are not sufficient in covering the cost of the classes
- A large proportion of those suffering from poor mental health are not receiving the benefits of the RIMAC Voucher Program



	Cost efficiency	Effectiveness	Resources
Add additional free classes	High	Low	High
Bring in teachers	Medium	High	High
Free online classes	Low	Low	Low

## Policy Implications

After reviewing the literature and identifying the gaps with the RIMAC Voucher system, we came up with three policy alternatives that we could propose to UC San Diego's CAPS and SHS:

- Add additional free classes:** Collaborate with RIMAC Recreation to provide more free group exercise classes and options available to UC San Diego students
- Bring in teachers:** Using RIMAC voucher data, determine the top 10 exercise classes students utilize the most and bring in teachers to teach these classes at CAPS or SHS at no cost to students to increase access to more students using CAPS services.
- Free online classes:** Similar to UC San Diego Recreation on Youtube during the COVID-19 Pandemic, direct students to online resources and Recreation classes. The online platform is ongoing and open to all UC San Diego students

Through this initiative to introduce Exercise is Medicine On Campus at UC San Diego, it will provide resources and ultimately help UC San Diego undergraduates lead healthier lifestyles, which may help to improve their mental health and well-being. It will have a far-reaching impact to not only those that visit CAPS, but also to the whole student population.

