



# Fulbright Canada Blog

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Dr. Brian Culp: Thursday's  
featured fulbrighter in  
celebration of International  
Education Week #IEW2014

## Health is a Ball of Wealth

Dr. Brian Culp, Fulbright Visiting Research Chair in The Person and Society 2014-2015,  
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My work revolves around understanding why people move and how to break down barriers for those who cannot, due to the lack of opportunity or other barriers. My excitement at being chosen as Fulbright Chair in the Person and Society at Concordia University was primarily because of emerging trends that are impactful for other cities in North America. First, Montreal is striving to meet the challenge of preserving the local heritage amidst the growing trend of internationalization. Second, people aren't participating in near enough health-enhancing behaviors, particularly as it relates to physical activity and increasingly as it relates to physical activity among indigenous populations, persons of color and immigrant groups.

An emerging body of research has attempted to identify reasons for this. These include language barriers, policies and regulations that have worked against underrepresented populations, and the lack of health initiatives that are culturally responsive. In a lecture that I gave a few weeks ago in an intervention in human systems course, I began talking about this using a simple object: A beach ball. Why?



A beach ball is an object that most of us can relate to. It's relatively inexpensive. Most of us have experienced hitting a beach ball in a recreational format or seen one being hit among a group of people. When the group is small, you have a better opportunity to participate. There is a feeling of accomplishment when we strike the ball and if it makes us feel good we want to do it more.





Adding more people to the group gives fewer opportunities for participation. This adds to the level of frustration for many. If you ever witness a group of people involved in this sort of activity, invariably, you will begin to see the following: 1) the few who have the knowledge and means of communication to strategize for control of the ball 2) others who feel as if they cannot compete but are not compelled to change the task and 3) those who leave after realizing that they do not have the knowledge and cannot compete in a task they felt initially confident about. The beach ball being hit is health, which many of us take for granted. In theory, health-enhancing behaviors can be demonstrated by all, but we have not had a history of effectively engaging diverse groups in providing this knowledge over the course of North American history.

As simple as this example sounds, it is at the foundation of the two projects that I am currently involved in. The first is a collaborative effort between the University of Regina, First Nations University of Canada and the University of Saskatchewan to try to promote Healthy Active Living among Indigenous Youth at a Tipi Camp in Saskatchewan. Indigenous youth are Canada's fastest growing demographic and have health risks that are impacted by the structure of physical activity in schools and community, economic practices and access to knowledge on healthy behavior. The overall goal is to promote interventions that decrease sedentary behavior while providing agency and leadership opportunities for youth.

The second project is a recent initiative with PHE Canada. We Belong is a program that engages community groups to participate in newcomer youth engagement through physical activity. In particular, it engages sport and physical activity as a means of health, integration and socialization. Community groups in common geographic areas will be gathering on a weekly basis for face-to-face meetings and asset building activities.

Both of these projects have been enhanced by the Fulbright Canada experience. I am confident that this work will help us shed light on interventions that can provide a social benefit through the promotion of health enhancing behaviors in communities.

I guarantee you'll never think about a beach ball in the same way again.

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