

“Take Back Your Time”: Facilitating a Student Led Teach-In

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Abstract

“Take Back Your Time” (TBYT) is a movement founded by John De Graaf (2003) that exposes the issues of time poverty and overwork in the United States and Canada. This article features the process whereby undergraduate students study De Graaf’s TBYT handbook, discuss its concepts, and organize a student-led TBYT “teach-in” for their college community. Primary learning objectives include (a) increasing students’ awareness of the societal issues of time poverty and overwork, (b) increasing students’ understanding of how overwork and time poverty can be addressed by recreation and leisure professionals, and (c) identifying ways to reverse the effects of time poverty and help people live healthier, more balanced lives. This learning activity would be suitable for courses in leisure education, program or event planning, current issues, or the foundations of the recreation and leisure profession.

KEYWORDS: Take Back Your Time, time constraints, leisure barriers, leisure education, experiential learning

“Take Back Your Time” (TBYT) is a movement founded by John De Graaf that exposes the issues of time poverty, overwork, and overscheduled lifestyles in the United States and Canada. In his edited handbook, *Take Back Your Time: Fighting Overwork and Time Poverty in America*, De Graaf (2003) and colleagues across varied disciplines pointed to some alarming facts. For example, Americans work an average of 9 weeks more than Europeans every year. Few Americans, only 14%, are able to take an annual vacation of two weeks or longer. Instead of giving Americans more free time as first presumed, technology has sped up our lives and

contributed to our sense of time crunch. Further, we have twice as much “stuff” as we had in the 1950s, but we are only half as happy. These realities force a pressing question: How can Americans find relief from time stress and live their lives with a greater sense of work-life balance?

To address this question, De Graaf has developed a website to accompany his handbook (www.timeday.org). The website is devoted to TBYT activities and setting a public policy agenda to address time poverty in the United States. Inspired by the concept of Earth Day, De Graaf and members of the Simplicity Forum (www.simplicityforum.org) have also initiated a national TBYT Day, celebrated annually on October 24. This date, 9 weeks before the end of the year, marks the date by which Americans, if they lived in Europe, would have completed their work year.

The issues of time poverty and work-life balance embraced by the TBYT movement are central to the values of the recreation and leisure profession. Recreation professionals who often advocate for a better quality of life are urgently needed to advance the TBYT message. Recreation professionals and students alike can play an important role in educating others about the value of time well-spent in meaningful leisure pursuits as well as the benefits recreation offers for health, well-being, and quality of life (O’Keefe, 2007).

College-age students, as most Americans, are faced daily with the challenges of time stress. Juggling school and work obligations with finding time for family, friends, and leisure pursuits has the potential to harm their health, family life, friendships, patterns of spending money, and general happiness. For their own well-being, and to prepare them to help others achieve a balanced lifestyle through their profession, it is important for students to be aware of the societal trends that plague a work-life balance in this country. It is also important to give students the sense that they are in control of the decisions they make regarding their health, fulfillment, and well-being. This learning activity can be used to raise students’ awareness of the problem of overwork and time poverty in America, and to encourage them to address this problem on a personal and societal level as recreation and leisure professionals.

Description of the Learning Activity

In this learning activity, students study and reflect on issues related to time poverty and overwork presented in the TBYT handbook. Students subsequently plan, facilitate, and evaluate a TBYT teach-in for the students, staff, and faculty at their college. The description below presents the activity as it was implemented in a leisure education class. Other educators, however, are encouraged to use this description only as a template for tapping into the creativity and talents of their students, allowing the teach-in to evolve according to the students’ own vision, insights, and energy.

Reading the TBYT Handbook

The TBYT handbook consists of 30 short chapters (six to eight pages each) on issues related to time poverty written by experts from disciplines as diverse as soci-

ology, economics, recreation, counseling, religion, public health, and environmental sustainability. Students read several chapters each week and maintain a running log of facts and figures related to time poverty and solutions recommended by the authors. These facts and solutions may later be incorporated into a presentation and handout for the TBYT teach-in. Based on these readings, students develop discussion questions, which serve as the basis for generating classroom conversation.

Planning the TBYT Teach-in

During class sessions, with the instructor's encouragement and facilitation, students plan the TBYT event. They begin by individually writing down their ideas related to the general aspects of the teach-in: (a) purpose, (b) agenda, (c) format, (d) leisure awareness activities, (e) student roles, (f) marketing, (g) handout information, (h) refreshments, (i) giveaways, and (j) other creative ideas. Students proceed by presenting their ideas verbally and everyone discusses them. As the plan for the event takes shape, the instructor develops and distributes a checklist whereby students indicate their preferred roles for the teach-in (see Table 1).

The information gathered from this checklist enables the instructor to assign students roles that match their strengths, talents, and preferences, and that are equitable in terms of the effort required to accomplish them. When tasks have been assigned, student teams are formed (e.g., marketing, PowerPoint development, hospitality).

While planning the event, students generate ideas to make the event as interesting and enjoyable as possible. For instance, when this activity was implemented in the leisure education course, students developed a fun "Jeopardy"-style quiz game to teach societal facts related to time poverty. A "leisure time clock" assessment was planned to help participants gain awareness of the amount of discretionary time they had and how they used it. Inexpensive toys were purchased from the Dollar Store as giveaways. To add a festive atmosphere, songs were played at the beginning and end of the event, such as "9 to 5" by Dolly Parton and "The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin' Groovy)" by Simon and Garfunkel.

The 1-hour teach-in was held in a central location (student campus center) over the noon hour, when most people on campus could attend. Budget items included refreshments, paper products, toys, name tags, and photocopying.

Leading the TBYT Teach-in

The students assume primary responsibility for leading the TBYT teach-in, with assistance provided by the instructor only as needed. This approach encouraged students to learn the material well enough to teach it to others and gain experience in the role of leisure educator. Student responsibilities for the teach-in appear in Table 1. The agenda for the event appears below:

1. **Introduction:** Why are we here? Why is Take Back Your Time Day on October 24?
2. **"Jeopardy" Game:** Facts and figures about time poverty and overwork in America.

TABLE 1
Checklist to Identify Students’ Preferred Roles for TBYT Teach-In

“Take Back Your Time” Teach-In
Student Roles

Please indicate your preferred role by checking the appropriate box.

Teach-In Roles	I would like to do	I’m willing to do	I’d rather not do	I would not like to do
PREPARATION				
1. Develop PowerPoint presentation				
• Scan TBYT posters				
• Find time-poverty statistics				
2. Develop “Jeopardy” quiz game				
3. Find leisure awareness activity				
4. Prepare handout(s)				
5. Purchase giveaways				
6. Identify AV needs and reserve equipment				
7. Find music to play at event				
8. Develop evaluation tool				
9. Marketing				
• Develop/distribute poster				
• Arrange newspaper coverage				
• Write campus e-news ad				
• Invite friends, staff, faculty				
DURING TEACH-IN				
10. Come early to set up room				
11. Host/emcee				
12. Facilitate large group activity				
13. Facilitate small group activity				
14. Staff AV				
15. Staff name tag table				
16. Greet and seat people				
17. Bring/distribute handouts				
18. Purchase/bring refreshments				
19. Implement evaluation				
20. Stay late to clean up				
AFTER TEACH-IN				
21. Analyze evaluation data				

3. **Personal Perspectives:** What are your experiences related to time poverty and overwork? What challenges related to time do you face? (small group discussion)
4. **Personal Solutions:** What could you do to take care of yourself and give yourself more time? (small group discussion)
5. **National Perspective:** What can we do as a society to take back our time?
6. **Closing Remarks:** Summary of key points. Giveaways!

Intended Outcomes

The intended outcomes of the learning activity are as follows: (a) to increase students' awareness of the societal issues of time poverty and overwork in North America; (b) to increase students' awareness of how the issues of time poverty and overwork personally impact their lives; (c) to assume the role of leisure educator and be able to articulate issues related to time poverty and overwork to others; (d) to increase students' understanding of how the issues of overwork and time poverty can be addressed through the recreation and leisure profession, and; (e) to identify ways to reverse the effects of time poverty and lead a healthier, more balanced lifestyle.

Suggestions for Use by Others

A leisure education course was chosen for this learning activity because of the compatibility between the concepts of time poverty and the concepts of leisure awareness, self-awareness, and cultivating a healthy leisure lifestyle. This learning activity, however, could be adopted in other kinds of courses. For example, a program or event planning course could include this activity, with the focus on planning and implementation of the TBYT Teach-in. Because of the broad societal context in which TBYT concerns are embedded, an instructor could also use the activity in a foundational recreation and leisure professions course or a seminar on current issues.

Instead of offering the teach-in on campus, a class could partner with a local community agency to co-sponsor the event. Settings could include park and recreation departments, residential facilities, youth services, YM/WCAs, Jewish Community Centers, or schools. Additionally, rather than sponsoring a one-time event, students could offer a series of educational sessions to encourage others to take back their time.

If the curriculum cannot accommodate organizing a teach-in, the handbook could be used by itself, as a supplemental text. The handbook raises many controversial and thought-provoking issues. Students will likely engage in some lively conversation as they come to grips with the issues and realize the need for recreation professionals to respond.

Whatever the course or application, students and participants will benefit tremendously from learning about the TBYT movement. They will gain awareness of how time poverty impacts their own lives and the lives of others in America. They will learn that TBYT is an important message for park and recreation professionals

to spread. And they will understand how they can exert greater personal control over time constraints and make choices that increase their ability to lead healthier, more balanced lives.

References

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- O'Keefe, C. (2007, November). *The Gold Metcalf Lecture on time poverty*. Keynote presented at the State University of New York Cortland Recreation Conference, Cortland, NY.